

Meals in the Early Christian World

Social Formation, Experimentation,
and Conflict at the Table



Edited by
Dennis E. Smith
and Hal Taussig



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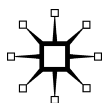
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Abbreviations

<i>AGRW</i>	<i>Associations in the Greco-Roman World</i> , ed. Ascough, Harland, and Kloppenborg
<i>AION</i>	<i>Annali dell'istituto Orientale di Napoli</i>
<i>AJP</i>	<i>American Journal of Philology</i>
<i>Anc. Soc.</i>	<i>Ancient Society</i>
<i>AThR</i>	<i>Anglican Theological Review</i>
<i>BAR</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
<i>BCH</i>	<i>Bulletin de correspondance hellénique</i>
<i>BJS</i>	Brown Judaic Studies
<i>CCSL</i>	Corpus Christianorum: Series latina
<i>CIL</i>	<i>Corpus inscriptionem latinarum</i>
<i>CurBS</i>	<i>Currents in Research: Biblical Studies</i>
<i>CW</i>	<i>Classical World</i>
<i>EPRO</i>	Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'empire romain
<i>FGH</i>	<i>Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker</i> , ed. F. Jacoby
<i>GR</i>	<i>Greece and Rome</i>
<i>HSCP</i>	<i>Harvard Studies in Classical Philology</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HTS</i>	Harvard Theological Studies
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
<i>Inscr. Erythrai</i>	Engelmann & Merkelbach, <i>Die Inschriften von Erythrai und Klazomenai</i>
<i>IFayum</i>	Bernand, <i>Inscriptions grecques du Fayoum</i> .
<i>IG</i>	<i>Inscriptiones graecae</i>
<i>ILS</i>	<i>Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae</i>
<i>IPerg</i>	Fränkel, <i>Die Inschriften von Pergamon</i>
<i>JAAR</i>	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>

<i>JAC</i>	<i>Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum</i>
<i>JdI</i>	<i>Jahrbuch des deutschen archäologischen Instituts</i>
<i>JECS</i>	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i>
<i>JFSR</i>	<i>Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion</i>
<i>JHS</i>	<i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i>
<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
<i>JÖAI</i>	<i>Jahreshefte des österreichischen archäologischen Instituts in Wien</i>
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
<i>JRA</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Archaeology</i>
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>L. A. B.</i>	<i>Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum</i> of Pseudo-Philo
<i>LCL</i>	Loeb Classical Library
<i>MMA</i>	Metropolitan Museum of Art
<i>NGSL</i>	Lupu, <i>Greek Sacred Law</i>
<i>NTOA</i>	Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus
<i>OGIS</i>	<i>Orientis graeci inscriptiones selectae</i>
<i>P&P</i>	<i>Past and Present</i>
<i>P.Coll Youtie</i>	<i>Collectanea Papyrologica: Texts Published in Honor of H.C. Youtie</i>
<i>PColon</i>	<i>Kölner Papyri</i>
<i>PCPS</i>	<i>Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society</i>
<i>P. dem. Berlin</i>	Spiegelberg, <i>Demotische Papyrus aus den königlichen Museen zu Berlin</i>
<i>P. dem. Cairo</i>	Spiegelberg, <i>Catalogue général des Antiquités égyptiennes du Musée du Caire</i>
<i>P. dem. Lille</i>	Sottas, <i>Papyrus démotiques de Lille</i>
<i>P. dem. Prag.</i>	Erichsen, <i>Die Satzungen einer ägyptischen Kultgnossenschaft aus der Ptolemäerzeit</i>
<i>P. Fouad</i>	<i>Les Papyrus Fouad I</i> , ed. P. Jouguet
<i>PG</i>	<i>Patrologia graeca</i>
<i>PLond</i>	Skeat, <i>Zenon Archive</i> .
<i>P. Mert.</i>	Rees, Bell, & Barns, <i>A Descriptive Catalogue of the Greek Papyri in the Collection of Wilfred Merton II</i>
<i>PMich</i>	Boak, <i>Papyri from Tebtunis</i> .
<i>POxy</i>	<i>Oxyrhynchus papyri</i>
<i>PPM</i>	<i>Pompeii, pitture e mosaici</i> , ed. Ida Baldassare et al.
<i>PW</i>	Pauly & Wissowa, <i>Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft</i>

1QS	<i>Rule of the Community</i> (Dead Sea Scrolls)
REA	<i>Revue des études anciennes</i>
RevPhil	<i>Revue de philologie</i>
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SIG	<i>Sylloge inscriptionum graecarum</i>
StPatr	<i>Studia Patristica</i>
TANZ	Texte und Arbeiten zum neutestamentlichen Zeitalter
TAPA	<i>Transactions of the American Philological Association</i>
Vg	Vulgate
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament

Introduction

Hal E. Taussig

Bursting out of the confines of historical esoterica and liturgical framings, this book drives the study of Greco-Roman meals into the middle of one of the most diverse and productive periods of Mediterranean history. The product of the Society of Biblical Literature Seminar on Meals in the Greco-Roman World from 2002 to 2010, this set of studies critically examines a wide range of social settings and implications for the Mediterranean-wide practice of festive meals. This critical examination results in a clear set of theses about the social significance of Greco-Roman festive meals.

The Smith–Klinghardt Meals Paradigm

The SBL Seminar was founded in response to a confluence of research on Greco-Roman meals by two New Testament scholars working independently on two different continents. Matthias Klinghardt's *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft* and Dennis Smith's *From Symposium to Eucharist* proposed and thoroughly documented separately the same integrative thesis.¹ Both Smith and Klinghardt were founding members of the SBL Seminar and members of the Seminar's Steering Committee.

Klinghardt and Smith proposed that there was a common meal tradition throughout the Greco-Roman Mediterranean that lay at the basis of all active meals of the Greco-Roman era, whether they be gentile, Jewish, or Christian.² Both Smith and Klinghardt have essays that summarize their foundational work in this volume. These essays are supplemented by Carolyn Osiek's contribution that presents a fascinating picture of the complex social context of Greco-Roman dining. Perhaps even more to the point, almost every essay in the book relies on the Smith–Klinghardt

typology. The SBL Seminar has demonstrated how the shift from a laundry list of types of meals during this period to a clear common meal paradigm observed throughout the Mediterranean world of the first century BCE to the fourth century CE changes the ways one reads much of that period's literature and understands its social dynamics. This shift has implications and applications to a wide range of textual study, social analysis of the hellenistic and Greco-Roman eras, understandings of second Temple Judaism, study of Christian beginnings, analysis of early Rabbinic Judaism, and study of both Jewish and Christian ritual observances, and is evident in each of the essays of this book.

This new paradigm for the study of the Greco-Roman Meal, as proposed in the combined work of Dennis Smith and Matthias Klinghardt, can be applied to a broad range of literature and social settings from the first century BCE to the fourth century CE. Such an application allows for the elaboration of the social meanings and dimensions of the Greco-Roman meal.

Reframing Understandings of Early Christian and Rabbinic Social Formation

The integrating lenses of this book are primarily the interest in meals relative to the beginnings of rabbinic Judaism and Christianity. Convinced of the applicability of the meal paradigm, the writers in this volume use the meal paradigm to press unanswered questions about what the Greco-Roman meal had to do with how Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity began. In many ways, this book represents that commitment to building a meal-related knowledge base that can play a significant role in understanding early Christian and rabbinic formation, especially social formation. That is, this collection of essays does not represent a disinterested accumulation of facts and analyses of meals. Rather the matter of relating such Greco-Roman meals to rabbinic and early Christian formation—even when with a light touch—drives much of the book.

Covering the subject matter of slaves at early Christian meals; women and dining posture at early Rabbinic meals; early Christian women at meals; women at Jewish and early Christian weddings; Valentinian responses to reclining; monastics and reclining; social bonds and boundaries in early Christian meals; the essays of Ellen Aitken, Jennifer Glancy, Lillian Larsen, Susan Marks, Jordan Rosenblum, and Angela Standhartinger act as the opening overture to what may well be several decades to come of research on how the Greco-Roman meal paradigm reshapes reflections on formative stages of Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity. In addition,

the book's overall proposal that there was a common meal paradigm for the Greco-Roman world dramatically reframes understandings of early Christian and Rabbinic formation, especially social formation.

Meals, Greco-Roman Associations, and the Hellenistic Economies

Two leading scholars on associations, Richard Ascough and Philip Harland, present a definitive case that Greco-Roman associations focused their life together on regular communal meals. These essays complement work on the same subject in earlier books by each of the authors.³ Of special importance, these essays address a major question about whether poor people participated in Greco-Roman meals, and break through a common assumption that they did not, since otherwise the only evidence for meals has tended to come from aristocratic settings. Harland and Ascough's essays show that poor workers, slaves, and women participated regularly in banquets through their membership in associations.⁴

This work breaks the logjam of worry about the prevalence of meals material concerning Greco-Roman aristocrats. It allows the flourishing of application of newly discovered epigraphic and literary data on associations to studies of both meals of poor people and a range of social locations of Rabbinic Judaism and early Christianity. It acts as another endorsement for ways that the Smith and Klinghardt meal paradigm can be applied to an increasingly wide range of situations within the Greco-Roman world.

The World of Slavery and Greco-Roman Festive Meals

The often all-too-invisible and very complex world of slavery was on full display from a variety of angles in Greco-Roman festive meals. This book opens new windows on the study of full participation by slaves in such meals and their devastating exploitation in the production of these same meals. Previous scholarship on meals, including the groundbreaking and integrative theses of Klinghardt and Smith, has not attended sufficiently to the prominent role of slaves in these meals. Here essays by Carly Daniel-Hughes, Nancy A. Evans, Lillian I. Larsen, Angela Standhartinger, and Jennifer A. Glancy lay out a complex picture of the participation of slaves in Greco-Roman meals, mostly as those serving others in one way or another. These essays lay out the dependence of most of the meals on slave labor and the array of behavior and sociopolitical power structures inherent in meal production. At the same time, as per Ascough and Harland in their work on associations, the full reclining participation of slaves—even in leadership

roles—comes into view in ways that confirm and complicate the assertions of early Christian and Rabbinic literature about such participation.

Women and Men at Greco-Roman Meals

In the past 25 years there has been some attention to how women and men interacted at these festive meals.⁵ This scholarship was most interested in laying out the significant patterns of male dominance, especially in the meals' reclining cultures, and left out significant portraits of real women negotiating participation in the meals. This book examines more closely a variety of specific occasions where women's lives intersect with meals. The result is a set of more specific questions and several complex and clearer portraits of women and men together at meals. Another set of essays by Daniel-Hughes, Standhartinger, Ellen B. Aitken, and Susan Marks examines gender roles in Greco-Roman meals in ways that supplement and complicate the earlier treatments. This study results in the conclusion that there was a complex mix of innovation and oppression between men and women at meals that is yet to be fully entangled.

The Role of Corporality, Sexuality, and Intimacy in the Culture of Reclining

The study of social meaning in relationship to these meals must attend to the role of corporality, sexuality, and intimacy in the culture of reclining at meals. The privilege of reclining as a demonstration of leisure has been examined with significant results.⁶ Before this book, only Matthew Roller's study⁷ had taken sufficient note of the ways reclining makes meaning in terms of intimacy, corporality, and sexuality. Almost a third of this book opens a new front in the elaboration of social meaning relative to Greco-Roman meals through its examination of corporality, sexuality, and intimacy in the Greco-Roman culture of reclining. Here essays by Aitken, Daniel-Hughes, Glancy, Larsen, and Rosenblum examine the complexities, power constructions, social connections, and identity formation substantially enacted at these meals.

The essays collected in this book represent a significant achievement of the SBL Seminar on Meals in the Greco-Roman World. Collectively, they propose a groundbreaking methodology for rethinking early Christian and Rabbinic social formation. The seminar's work has already resulted in a number of newly published works, a *partial* list of which would include Hal Taussig's *In the Beginning was the Meal: Social Experimentation and Early Christian Identity*, Jordan Rosenblum's *Food and Identity in Early*

Rabbinic Judaism, and the collection of essays edited by Matthias Klinghardt and Hal Taussig, *Mahl und religiöse Identität im frühen Christentum*.⁸ Future publications spotlighting the work of the seminar are planned for the near future in which the results of the approach demonstrated in this book will be applied to a comprehensive reexamination of Eucharistic origins and meals in early Judaism.

Notes

1. Actually the first full-blown articulation of the thesis is Smith's unpublished 1980 Harvard University dissertation, *Social Obligation in the Context of Communal Meals: A Study of the Christian Meal in I Corinthians in Comparison with Graeco-Roman Communal Meals*. The first (small) book published with this thesis was Smith and Taussig's, *Many Tables: The Eucharist in the New Testament and Liturgy Today* (1990).
2. Klinghardt and Smith's proposal(s) rejected both the Jewish-centered hypotheses of Jeremias and the various multiple typologies of Greco-Roman meals in the works of Leitzmann, Klauck, and Kollmann.
3. Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations*; Ascough, *Paul's Macedonian Associations*.
4. Cf. applied discussion of Ascough and Harland's work in this regard in Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal*, 87–114.
5. Kathleen Corley has produced two volumes on gender, early Christianity, and meals: *Private Women, Public Meals*; and *Maranatha*. Matthew Roller, a classicist, focuses on gender and meals in *Dining Posture*.
6. See Klinghardt, Smith, and Smith and Taussig in endnote 1 above; and the study of Taussig in *In the Beginning Was the Meal*, 45, 46, 69–71, 157–171.
7. Cf. Roller, *Dining Posture in Ancient Rome*, 45–52, 91–94, and 101–106.
8. The papers collected in *Mahl und religiöse Identität im frühen Christentum* were originally presented at a conference in Dresden, Germany, June 15–18, 2011.

PART I

The Typology of the Greco-Roman
Banquet

CHAPTER 1

A Typology of the Communal Meal

Matthias Klinghardt

This typology intends to sketch out the typical setting, external form, and problems of the community meal in the early Christian world. Since it provides a “thick description,” it does not aim at individual meals. Rather it processes a multitude of individual data from the Mediterranean cultures of Hellenistic and Roman times into a general picture that allows one to distinguish between what might qualify for the rule or norm and what would appear to be an exception or anomaly. To conserve space, only a few examples from the large body of available evidence are included here for illustration.¹

The typology is based on the phenomenology of the external form of meals and only then includes ideas attributed to meals. This procedure distinguishes it from previous research aligned with the “religionsgeschichtliche Schule,” which identified many different “types” of meals.² Indeed, the basic idea of this essay asserts that all such “types” belong to one and the same category, fair and square: the communal meal.

The Form of the Communal Meal

The culture of the ancient meal was formed by political and social shifts in the Greek polis from the end of the sixth century onward. Reclining during meals, originally a privilege of nobility, became an expression of civic freedom and equality among free men, and quickly spread vertically through society. The banquet mirrored the androcentric polis-community and

served as a guarded space within which acceptable political behavior could be learned and transmitted.³ The decline of the political importance of the polis and of citizens' political participation in the third century resulted in a depoliticization of the meal. Gradually, the banquet became open to women and to slaves, and it absorbed the social functions of the polis, primarily in the many voluntary associations that represented public life. This development can hardly be overestimated: the central event in the many associations coming into being in early Hellenism, as well as in the early Principate, was the communal banquet meal.⁴ Social exchange and the experience of community on virtually all levels between the private household and gatherings of all citizens in the theater had their institutionalized place in the communal meal.

Twofold Structure

The institutionalized character of the communal meal and its enormous social importance is reflected by the very narrow formal structure of its conduct. For the most part, communal meals in the ancient Mediterranean were twofold events. The meal proper (δείπνον or συσσίτιον in Greek sources, *cena* in Latin) was always followed by a drinking party, the symposium proper (συμπόσιον; *convivium*). Furthermore, the social importance of the “constructive drinking” during the symposium exceeds that of eating together as demonstrated by the vast sympotic literature.⁵

The ubiquitous twofold structure provides needed context for understanding Christian meals within the first two centuries of the Common Era. They were not “sacramental meals” in token form but real meals. Citations of “bread” and “wine” refer to the two main parts of any communal meal rather than to the sacramental aspects of a token meal, which first appears during the third century CE.

Eating

Before the third century, Christian meals were—like all meals in the Hellenistic-Roman world—real meals in which the participants ate their fill. It is safe to assume that several courses typically were served in such a dinner.⁶ Naturally, the table included a wide variety of foodstuffs, whose range depended on the host's or the respective meal group's financial means and cultural backgrounds. One must realize, however, that unlike today in the same part of the world, meat (and fish where available) was regularly consumed by the wealthy only. Most of the population during the Greco-Roman era primarily had diets of grains and vegetables.⁷ Meats were served

as side dishes (ᾠψον) accompanied by cereal flat cakes or bread.⁸ The latter was indispensable for scooping up the side dishes since silverware was unknown. Breaking (and handing out) bread is, therefore, not a Christian trait but rather the routine gesture with which any meal would begin.⁹

The structural distinction between the eating and the drinking parts of a meal implies that drinks were not served during the dinner. This, however, is only generally so since a cultural difference and probably a shift of meal customs is evident in the literature. Later Roman authors claim that drinking during the meal proper was unheard of in “olden times.”¹⁰ They do not, however, specify when this was. But in the first century CE Petronius could characterize the nouveau-riche Trimalchio’s ignoble lack of manners by having him serve wine during the dinner already, thus confirming the general etiquette.¹¹

On the other hand, the eating part of the meal could be opened by aperitifs. The terminology is technical: From Greek sources we know about the “in-advance cup” (πρόπομα) that was served before dinner started.¹² As a borrowed word this expression made it into Latin sources where it designates starter courses in general.¹³ In Latin, the appetizers could be called “*promulsis*” from the mead (*mulsum*) that was served for aperitifs.¹⁴ In any case, this mild, even sweet drink¹⁵ is clearly distinguished from the wine that was served later for the symposium, which further corroborates the general distinction between the two parts.¹⁶

Libation

The libation followed the dinner proper and marked the opening of the symposium. This religious ceremony, which could take different forms, was typical and well established. It is well attested not only for meals with a religious background but also for meals that appear to be completely “secular” in a modern sense. Consequently, any form of community within the setting of a communal meal carried at least rudimentary aspects of religion: The experience of community could not be envisioned without some connection with the transcendent.

The libation could be performed in different ways, among which two are prominent: The cup of unmixed wine could either be poured out on the floor or into the hearth, or it could be drunk by all symposiasts.¹⁷ The evidence is not evenly distributed: On the one hand, the majority of sources clearly presuppose that the libation was poured out. They either mention it directly¹⁸ or imply it when mentioning slaves who perform the libation.¹⁹ On the other hand, the libation could clearly be drunk by all symposiasts from one cup. Again, the cup circulating among the symposiasts is directly attested in some cases²⁰ and clearly implied in others.²¹

These two forms for performing the libation are also attested for Jesus' Last Supper: Mark 14:23 and Matthew 26:27 directly mention that Jesus had the disciples drink from the one cup he handed out; on the other hand, Luke 22:20 clearly states that the cup "after dinner" was "poured out."²² With respect to the etiological character of the Last Supper accounts in Luke and 1 Corinthians 11, it is safe to assume that at least part of the early Christian meal practice followed a similar procedure.

As with any other sacrifice in antiquity, the libation was accompanied by prayer. For the Roman world, the formula "May the gods be gracious!" (*dii propitii*) is the shortest reference to this prayer. As Petronius demonstrates (Sat. 60.8), it is part of the sacrifice for the *Lares*, which had its definite place in private household meals.²³ Cato the Elder provides detailed instructions for the performance of the libation and even offers the particular wording of an old prayer to *Iuppiter Dapalis*, that is, the "feast Jupiter."²⁴ In Greek sources the libation prayer is the *paean*. Plutarch states that the *paean*—in contrast to the *skolia* sung during the symposium—was to be recited by all symposiasts in unison,²⁵ thus emphasizing the central importance of the libation ceremony. The significance of the *paean* is further elucidated by the fact that it was often accompanied by flute music. Flute accompaniment served the ritual function of safeguarding the proper recitation, and thus the efficiency, of prayers.²⁶ Further indication of its importance comes from Plato's statement that the (female) flute player could not be dismissed from the symposium—although he would not want to have women present—because she was necessary for the libation ceremony.²⁷

Reciting the libation prayer in unison is also attested by other references about the grace after dinner. Not only the Therapeutae sing their song after dinner in unison,²⁸ but also Christians.²⁹ Performing a prayer in unison contributes to its religious effectiveness; it requires, however, considerable coordination. It isn't surprising, then, that fixed formularies existed for such prayers.³⁰ Among the well-known examples are the thanksgiving prayer "after the full meal" in Didache 10:2–6³¹ as well as the mishnaic formularies for the prayers at the table or the grace after dinner, the *birkat ha-mazon*.³² In light of this evidence there can be no doubt that "the cup of blessing which we bless" (τὸ ποτήριον τῆς εὐλογίας ὃ εὐλογοῦμεν: 1Cor 10:16) refers to the libation cup and the accompanying prayer.

Symposium and Sympotic Entertainment

After the libations were poured or drunk, the wine was mixed with water, dessert could be served, and the symposium proper began.³³ The most important feature of the symposium, highlighted by the literary descriptions, is

the entertainment.³⁴ A great variety is reported: presentations of music and dance, of *mimus* and *phantomimus*; performances of *skolia*; dexterity competitions and juggling; sundry drinking games (including the famous *kottabos*), as well as many different codes for drinking behavior. But first of all was table talk. Conversation among the symposiasts was central and gave birth to a whole literary genre, the symposion-literature that flourished for nearly 800 years.³⁵

Obviously the preferred entertainment varied widely and was largely dependent on the participants' cultural background and educational level. Irrespective of any particular entertainment however, two characteristic features stand out in the literary descriptions. The first, which is often highlighted, is the mutuality of the sympotic entertainment. The symposiasts emphasized common amusement rather than the pursuit of private pleasure. The sources express a clear expectation that all participants would contribute their share to the common entertainment or learning: Each individual "input" (συμβολή) is part of the collective gift that everybody "throws together" and shares. In this fashion, the contributions to sympotic entertainment mirror the participants' contributions to the meal proper, which also were called "input" (συμβολαί).³⁶ Thus when Plutarch expounds on the anacreontic songs performed during the symposium (the *σκόλια*), he is absolutely clear that *all* participants are expected to take their turn and contribute a song of their own to the general amusement.³⁷ That this mutuality of entertainment responsibility could extend to learned discussion and to religious speech is clear from a number of references.³⁸

Cutting against the grain of this mutuality is the observation that many of these pleasures had a very competitive edge. Drinking, singing, juggling, poetic witticisms, discussion, riddle solving, even trying to hit a swinging bowl with the last sip of the cup—all these activities are reported among the kinds of small competitions for which the winning symposiasts would receive a token award (for example, a special dessert cake). Understandably, this abundance of competition called for a referee. In fact, many sources mention a symposiarch who would oversee the sympotic entertainment and try to keep everything in good order. Amazingly symposiarchs are reported not only for the banquets of organized associations where they are listed among the club officials,³⁹ but also for private and informal symposia.⁴⁰ Many designations for the symposiarch indicate that his function was to direct manners of drinking. It appears that the symposiarch often was an ad hoc appointee to oversee the entertainment: He had to steer a course for the symposium between a sober (and rather boring) lack of hilarity⁴¹ and the ebrious raucousness that easily could get out of hand and lead to quarrels and beatings. The symposiarch's responsibility to warrant "good order"

probably best describes his task. This function, of course, closely resembles that of the Christian bishop as the overseer of the Eucharist.

Typical Problems and Ideals of the Meal

Thus far, the data on the external form of meals clearly describe an ideal “type” of Greco-Roman meal. But the characteristic similarity is not restricted to the “external form.” It also extends to “contents” and meaning. Since the communal meal was one of the most important social institutions of ancient Mediterranean life, not only was its ritual structure basically identical in different cultures and times, but it also raised similar problems, for which similar solutions were found that were based on similar basic values. Just as the typical “form” of a text constitutes a genre that belongs to typical situations of communication and has a “meaning” of its own, typical ideals correspond to the typical form of the Greco-Roman meal.⁴²

Community (κοινωνία)

Most important among these sympotic ideals is κοινωνία, the community among the diners. The whole idea of meals concerns seeking and keeping company. As Plutarch famously says: “You can eat your fill alone by yourself, but you cannot dine alone—this can be done only in the joyous and entertaining company of others.”⁴³

The whole spatial layout of the meal serves this end. The typical pi-shaped arrangement of the *triclinium* with the couches (*klinai*) running along three sides, leaving the fourth side and the center open, enables the symposiasts to see and converse with each other perfectly.⁴⁴ Even the size of the *triclinia* expresses the high appreciation for *koinōnia*: The archaeological remains range from 7 to as many as 17 couches (in the *hestiatorion* of the Asklepieion in Troizen); 11 to 13 couches appear most often⁴⁵ and represent a standard that was even used as a basic architectural measure.⁴⁶ If larger groups needed more seating, they would not augment the number of couches within a *triclinium* but instead multiply the number of *triclinia*. Plutarch explains why: A sympotic group that is too large will split up in two or more rounds of talking—and thus destroy the community.⁴⁷

The basic idea of community also is responsible for other aspects of the meal. Usually, all participants ate the same food, drank the same wine from the same *kratēr*, sang the *paean* together in unison, and contributed their share to the sympotic entertainment and sometimes even to the food (as in a potluck party). Understandably, problems and questions arose whenever

one of these basic markers for community went unrealized or was put into question.

Equality (ἰσότης)

Seemingly the easiest way to guarantee *koinōnia* is to provide equality among the symposiasts. The famous equation of equality and friendship⁴⁸ bears witness that a sympotic community is one of friendship (*philia*) among equals. But differences of social esteem exist, even among peers, and this is particularly evident in the symposium: Since it is the foremost social institution for people to meet each other, it is also the place where social status within the peer group must be maintained and demonstrated.

The distinct competitiveness of the symposium is reflected, on a larger scale, in club banquets, as the vast epigraphic evidence demonstrates. Their main activity during the symposium was to pay tribute to merited members, which undercut equality and posed a threat to the sense of community.

Two problems are mentioned repeatedly. In honoring prominent members, food and wine would be served in different quantities or qualities. Nonetheless, equality could easily be maintained when all had the same food, the watchword being “No differences!” as many of the more prominent sources put it.⁴⁹ More difficult was the problem of where one was placed at the meal: In the *triclinium* some places were regarded as more honorable and more comfortable than others, the best place being usually on the middle couch (*lectus medius*), the least either on the lowest couch (*lectus imus*) or on the chairs set up for women.⁵⁰ In contrast to the differences of food, there is no easy solution for the problem of placement since everyone cannot recline in the best spot. Hence we repeatedly hear about fights over places.⁵¹

The main difficulty, however, results from conflicting aims. On one side is the expectation that the symposium reflects participants’ social status outside the gathering. On the other is the appraisal that the extremely high esteem for equality embedded in the symposium will serve as a counter model for community in which otherwise important social differences are evened out.⁵² In this view, the symposium and its seating arrangement must under no circumstances repeat the social divisions that exist outside. Hence the numerous demands for equality and impartiality (“Make no differences!”).⁵³

Good Order, Quietness, and Peace

Of course, there is no way to harmonize this conflict. It is, therefore, very instructive to see how this question of placement is solved. Plutarch, who

discusses all relevant aspects in his well-balanced way, is most instructive. Since the seating arrangement can provide neither equal nor socially adequate places, the next best thing is to keep good order: Even worse than insulting an important guest by offering him an inferior place would be a fight among symposiasts for the better places. Therefore, Plutarch argues for a moderately managed reclining arrangement and asks the host not to neglect his duties as an usher. If the sympotic arrangements cannot provide equality, “good order” (εὐταξία; εὐκοσμία) is the next best thing and an ideal in its own right. Plutarch follows the example of many clubs and associations: a fixed reclining order that is secured by prohibition (under the threat of fines) from taking another member’s place.⁵⁴ The result is, hopefully, good order. Thus the fear of chaos among the symposiasts is such that the organization of the symposium is often compared to the proper formation of an army for battle: both represent a problem of good order, as an anecdote about Aemilius Paullus has it.⁵⁵

“Good order” (εὐκοσμία) covers much more than simply the reclining arrangements. Sympotic *eukosmia* relates to the whole sequence of activities during the symposium. If everything happens “decently and in order” (1Cor 14:40), there will not be any “disorder,” but rather “peace” (1Cor 14:33). These quotations from 1 Corinthians are typical in every respect and vastly paralleled: On the one hand, calling for *eukosmia* was typical for the sympotic entertainment. In particular, it seemed difficult to maintain a decent conversation among participants who were competitive, tried to establish their rank among peers, and consumed more and more alcohol. The picture of a progressively yelling and even fighting crowd is the object of many descriptions in the symposium-literature and of epigraphic evidence from club statutes.⁵⁶

On the other hand, the antagonism of disorder and peace, together with the religious language, perfectly fits into the overall picture of the symposium. Quietness (ἡσυχία) is often mentioned along with peace, grace, and joyousness as a description of the sympotic situation, and this usually has a very strong religious connotation or appears directly in the invocations of prayers.⁵⁷ Thus the symposium provides the setting for a very complex, encompassing religious experience.

The Symposium as Utopia

The values—good order, quietness, peace—attributed to the symposium clearly relate to its utopian character. Indeed, there are many hints that the symposium provided an experience that transcended the limitations of everyday life and became important for exactly this utopian quality. To

develop a utopian counter image, it is not enough to experience the deficiencies of current realities; it also requires at least a trace of perfection that then can be further developed within a larger utopian imagery. The values of community, quietness, and peace attributed to the communal meal mark its ability to provide utopian perfection. In the ancient sources two aspects stand out.

On the one hand, the boundless abundance of foodstuffs connected to the meal is characteristic: The communal, festive meal is the place to overcome the meagerness of daily life. From the Attic Comedy onward, there are descriptions of culinary excess that depict situations with an abundance of food (not only delicacies, but also regular victuals). All these visions are located in Hades: it is the other world, reigned over by Pluto who, of course, represents copiousness and riches.⁵⁸ In addition, there are many references to culinary excess in elegiac poetry. From Pindar to Theognis, from Bacchylides to Xenophanes, the envisioned idyll takes the form of the symposium. That is, a predominant way to express hope for the perfect community is the description of a symposium.⁵⁹

The other important aspect of utopian perfection is equality and the absence of social divisions. This goes far beyond simply handing out identical portions to the diners. The equality of the communal meal finds its most astonishing and instructive expression in the annihilation of the fundamental division that formed the Greco-Roman world, the gap between those serving and attending to and those who are being served and attended to. Numerous texts demonstrate that this basic order is given up in the context of the communal meal. Either the free do without the service of slaves and attend to themselves, which means that the social difference is leveled and no longer visible; or the free serve, even the slaves, which means that the usual hierarchy is reversed. Among the references⁶⁰ are well-known examples from the New Testament and others from Saturnalia tradition.⁶¹

In light of these exceptional regulations, the communal meal is not simply a mirage of utopia that can be seen and contemplated but not touched; instead participants directly experience a brief taste of utopia. This experience, however, is partial and/or limited to particular ritual situations: The difference between the ritual perfection and the “perfect”, that is, fully realized perfection is still something to be desired. Paul marks this very difference by his eschatological expectation.⁶²

Ritual Grammar: Conclusions

The phenomenological approach toward a typology has proved helpful. Although wide enough to encompass evidence from quite different

cultural backgrounds, it allows for individual deviation in single instances. Simultaneously, it is precise enough to establish the meal as one of the most important formative social institutions of ancient societies. One basic insight to be gained from this picture is that early Christian meals are not a distinct feature separating early Christianity from its environment but a thread connecting it with pagan and Jewish culture of the time.

Similar to the literary genre of texts this phenomenological typology is a descriptive category: an abstraction based on features common to many—but certainly not all—individual descriptions of meals. Just as a literary genre is not a text but the grammatical and formal structure in which texts are presented to enable understanding, this typology provides a grammar for social understanding. Just as the abstraction of a literary genre carries an understanding of its own, so does the “typical” meal: inherent to it is a particular semantics.⁶³ In different meal “texts,” this basic semantics may be spelled out differently but not arbitrarily, and certainly not against the genre’s basic semantics. More or less, all meals in the early Christian world enabled people living in similar social situations to have similar religious experiences: the awareness of being part of a community that confers personal acceptance and a particular place within the group; the tangible feeling of grace, abundance, and justice; and anticipation of the utopian counter-experience that transcends the experience of everyday life.

Notes

1. Most comprehensively collected in M. Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl*, 21–174; for the editions of ancient sources see 539–55.
2. The best overview and, at the same time, the ultimate epitaph to this methodological approach is H.-J. Klauck, *Herrenmahl*.
3. Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl*, 158–63.
4. On meals in Greco-Roman associations see Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl*, 29–45 (and *passim*); Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 87–131; McRae, “Eating with Honor,” 165–181.
5. Variations to this model that develop in the Roman period will be discussed in more detail in Smith’s essay in this volume.
6. On the distinction between starters and main courses as well as on the average food stuffs see Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl*, 49–57. For other aspects of diet at Christian meals, see McGowan, *Ascetic Eucharists*.
7. For examples of average people’s regular diets, cf. the references in Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 2.55a; 56e. For first-century Rome see Martial, *Epigr.* 5.78 (starters: salad, leech, eggs, tuna; main courses: sausage, *puls*, beans, ham; dessert: fruit and nuts); 10.48; 12.19. See also Pliny, *Ep.* 1.15; Cicero, *Fam.* 9.20; Macrobius, *Sat.* 3.13.12.

8. (Baked) bread became a regular part of the everyday menu only around the first century BCE/CE; cf. Pliny the Elder, *Nat.* 18.19.83; Valerius Maximus 2.5.5; Juvenal, *Sat.* 14.170–1; Berger, *Manna*.
9. For example, Aristophanes, *Eq.* 1167.
10. For example, Aulus Gellius, *Noct. att.* 13.11.6; Macrobius, *Sat.* 2.8.3; 3.18.1 etc.
11. Petronius, *Sat.* 34 (wine is brought in, whereas the libation is mentioned only in *Sat.* 60); for further references s. Kircher, *Sakrale Bedeutung*, 13ff.
12. Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 2 (58b/c).
13. For example, Martial, *Epigr.* 5.78.3.
14. Petronius, *Sat.* 34.1; Horace, *Sat.* 2.4.24; Cicero, *Fam.* 9.16.8; 9.20.1 etc.
15. For the preparation of “honey-wine” (οἶνον μέλι/*mulsum*) cf. Pliny the Elder, *Nat.* 14.75.80; 22.2.53; Horace, *Sat.* 2.2.15; Martial, *Epigr.* 4.13.4; Macrobius, *Sat.* 7.12.
16. Plautus, *Pers.* 87; Varro, *Rust.* 3.16.1; Cicero, *Tusc.* 3.44 etc.
17. See also Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 29–30.
18. For example, Homer, *Od.* 3.431; Servius, *Aen.* 1.730; Cato, *Agr.* 132.
19. Cf. the references in Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 15 (665b–d; here with the technical terminology: σπονδὰς παραχέω). See also Petronius, *Sat.* 60.8 etc.
20. Cf. Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 11 (504a), quoting from a play of Menander’s (“Let the first cup of unmixed wine circle among them!”); see also Pollux, *Onom.* 6.31 (s.v. κύλιξ μετανιπτρίς: ἢ ἐπὶ πᾶσιν) Cf. Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 11 (487a) who identifies the μετανιπτρίς-cup as the libation for *Agathodaimon* and *Zeus Soter*.
21. For example, Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* 8.12.
22. The apposition “poured out for you” clearly refers to “this cup,” not to “in my blood.” The syntactical congruence between the apposition (in the nominative) and the referent in the dative is recognized by a number of English translations, such as RSV; NRV; NAS; ESV; NEV. For the problem see M. Klinghardt, “Vergossener Becher.”
23. On the sacrifice for the *Lares* after dinner cf. Virgil, *Aen.* 1.723ff; 8.238; Horace, *Sat.* 2.2.124, etc.
24. Cato, *Agr.* 132.
25. Plutarch, *Quaest. conv.* 1.1.5 (615a/b).
26. Klinghardt, “Prayer Formularies,” 14–17.
27. Plato, *Symp.* 176e; Plutarch, *Quaest. conv.* 7.8 (713a); *Sept. sap. conv.* 5 (150d); Propertius 4.6.8.
28. Philo, *Contempl.* 83f.
29. E.g., Ign. *Magn.* 7:1–2; Ign. *Eph.* 4:1–2 (ἐν τῇ ὁμονοίᾳ ὑμῶν καὶ συμφώνῳ ἀγάπῃ ... ἄδεται); 1 *Clem.* 34:7; *Ascension of Isaiah* 7:15; 9:28; *Apoc. Pet.* 4.19 (Akhmīm fragments, ed. Klostermann 10,1f) etc.
30. On the whole problem s. Klinghardt, “Prayer Formularies” (with more evidence and lit.).
31. *Did.* 10:1: μετὰ δὲ τὸ ἐμπλησθῆναι. On the prayers in *Did.* 9–10 see Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl*, 375–492.

32. Cf. *m. Ber.* VI–VIII. On the text of the *birkat ha-mazon* and its relationship to *Did.* 10 see Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl*, 418–27.
33. On mixing wine and water and on the typical desserts and their designation as “second tables” see Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl*, 113–5.
34. See also Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 34–38.
35. Martin, *Symposion* (passim); for the sympotic entertainment in general with further references cf. Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl*, 111–29.
36. *συμβολή* is the widespread and technical term for the dues in associations that were usually spent for organizing dinners (epigraphical evidence at Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl*, 132–7). But the expression is also used for the contributions to meals of groups with little or no organizational structure, e.g., Xenophon, *Symp.* 1.15–6; Aristophanes, *Ach.* 1210; Terence, *Andr.* 1.1.161; Terence, *Eun.* 3.4; Lucian, *Dial. meretr.* 7.1. The parallelism of every participant’s contributing to the meal *and* to the sympotic entertainment has a close analogy in 1Cor 11:33; 14:26!
37. Plutarch, *Quaest. conv.* 1,5 (615a/b). This reference is of importance, since Plutarch clearly distinguishes the singing of the *paean* in unison from the individually performed *skolion*.
38. Artemon (quoted by Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 15, b/c); Philo, *Contempl.* 80–1: “everybody” (ἕκαστος) sings their hymns; Tertullian, *Apol.* 39.18: “Everybody (*quisquis*) is asked to sing ... as he/she is able to sing a praise to God.” Cf. also 1Cor 14:26.
39. Cf. *συμποσιάρχος*: OGIS 664 (= *IGRom.* III 1045, l.14f; 263/268 CE); *IGRom.* III 1533 (202 CE); *συμποσιάρχης*: *Inscr. Erythrai* 105; Γ 44 Po.); *οἰνοποσιάρχης*: Lüders, *Dionysische Künstler*, 44B (= Foucart, *Associations Religieuses*, 64, l. 12); Zingerle, *JÖAI* 6 (1903), 122, l. 1.
40. Plato, *Symp.* 213e (“ruler of the drinking”); Alexis (quoted by Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 10;431c: “symposiarch”); Plutarch, *Quaest. conv.* 1.4.1 (620a: “ruler”); Lucian, *Sat.* 4 (“king”); Horace, *Carm.* 1.4.18 (“king of wine”); Horace, *Carm.* 2.7.25 (“referee for the drinking”) etc. Cf. also Marquardt *Privatleben*, 331f; Becker, *Charikles II*, 352ff.
41. According to Horace, *Sat.* 2.6.67, the symposiarch could order “insane laws.” Lucian states that the “king” of the symposium is not subject to ridiculous assignments but can give improper instructions himself, such as saying something shameful about himself, dancing in the nude, or carrying the flute girl around the table (Lucian, *Sat.* 4).
42. Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl*, 152.174.
43. Plutarch, *Quaest. conv.* 7 *prol.* (697c).
44. For the spatial layout of dining rooms and sympotic architecture s. Dunbabin, “Convivial Spaces,” 66–80; Dunbabin, *Roman Banquet*, 36–102. For the difference between Greek and Roman dining rooms cf. Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl*, 61–97.
45. For archaeological data see. Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl*, 67–74.
46. McCartney, “Unit of Measurement,” 30–35.

47. This argument is from Plutarch, *Quaest. Conv.* 5.5 (679a/b).
48. Aristotle, *Eth. nic.* 1168b, 6ff.
49. Xenophon, *Mem.* 3.14.1ff; Pliny, *Ep.* 2.6; Lucian, *Sat.* 17; 1Cor 11:19.
50. Cf. for the layout Dunbabin, *Roman Banquet*, 36–71; for the social problem cf. Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl*, 75–97.
51. For example, Plutarch, *Sept. sap. conv.* 3 (148f/149B); Lucian, *Symp.* 9; Lucian, *Dial. d.* 15 (13) etc.
52. For a detailed discussion of this problem cf. Plutarch, *Quaest. conv.* 1.2 (615c–619a).
53. For example, Theopompus of Chios (quoted by Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 4; 149d); Lucian, *Sat.* 17; Jas 2:1–4.
54. For place arrangements in associations cf. the statutes of the Athenian *Iobacchoi* (SIG 1109, l. 73). An Egyptian association in Tebtunis fines a member who pushes forward and does not remain in queue with three *oboloi* (PMich V 243, l. 6f; similarly in the Zeus Hypsistos association PLond VII 2193, l. 18f, reconstructed by Brashear, *Vereine*, 34f). See also: CIL XIV 2112 (= ILS 7212), col. II, l. 25–28; P. Merton 56, l. 12f; P. dem. Lille 29, l. 11. For Jewish evidence cf. 1QS 2.23f (s. Klinghardt, “Manual”); Philo, *Contempl.* 30; 67. Smith discusses associations and their statutes in *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 87–131.
55. Plutarch, *Quaest. conv.* 1.2.2 (615f); cf. Demetrius of Skepsis (Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 4; 141e/f); Heracleides of Cumae (Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 4 145b/f).
56. Shouting and fighting in associations: SIG 1109, l. 63–67 (no singing, yelling, hand-clapping; everything shall happen “in all order and quietness”); l. 71–94; SIG 736, l. 42ff (εὐσχημόνως καὶ εὐτάχτως); P. dem. Prag, col. A, l. 13–9; P. dem. Cairo 31179, l. 24–6 (148/147 BCE); P. dem. Cairo 30605, l. 21–2 (157/156 BCE); P. dem. Cairo 30606, l. 20–1 (158/157 BCE); Josephus, *B.J.* 2.132; 1QS 6.9–13; Philo, *Contempl.* 40–63 etc. See also Xenophon, *Cyr.* 2.2.23; Horace, *Sat.* 2.8.33ff; 2.8.64; Petronius, *Sat.* 26.8–9; 78.8; Lucian, *Symp.* 42–5; Lucian, *Merc. cond.* 14.670; 17.627; Cena Cypriani (ed. Harnack 9). For the literary topic cf. Martin, *Symposion*, 127ff.
57. For sympotic quietness (ἡσυχία) cf. SIG 1109, l. 63f; Pindar, *Nem.* 9.48; Solon, *Eleg. fr.* 4.5ff (ed. West 121ff); Theognis 8856 (“Shall peace and abundance rule in the city, so that I can with others/dine. I do not love terrible war”); Theognis 757–64 etc. The same idea is expressed in the invocation of sympotic peace (a typical example: Bacchylides fr. 4 ed. Maehler 114ff), cf. Slater, “Peace”; Murray, “War”; Fisher, “Drink.”
58. Cf. Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl*, 163ff; Fauth, “Kulinarisches.” For the particular Cockaigne aspects s. Dohm, *Ageiros*, 61ff; Baldry, “Idler’s Paradise”; Smit, *Fellowship and Food*.
59. Cf. Xenophanes, fr. 1 (Diels/Kranz); Bacchylides fr. 20b (Maehler 126) etc.
60. For example, Theopompus of Chios (Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 4; 149d: equal portions of food and the same wine for masters and slaves); Strabo, *Geogr.* 16.4.26 (the Nabatean king renounces slaves and serves himself); Plutarch, *Quaest. conv.* 1.2 (616f); *Inscr. Stratonikeia* 22 (second cent. CE; from the cult of Zeus

Panamaros: “The God invites all people for dinner and he prepares a common and equally honorable table for everybody, from wherever they come”); *T. Job* 15 (Job’s sons serve the poor); Philo, *Contempl.* 70–72 (service not by slaves, but by members).

61. Jn 13:1–20; Luke 22:24–30. The most prominent example from the Saturnalia tradition is the “symptotic laws” in Lucian, *Sat.* 17.
62. 1Cor 11:26: “until he comes.”
63. Taussig, *Beginning*, 29, correctly observed that the values connected to the meal as discussed above “oversimplify the social dynamic itself in the meals.” Understood as part of the ritual meal grammar, however, they hardly can be conceptualized as dynamic categories.

CHAPTER 2

The Greco-Roman Banquet as a Social Institution

Dennis E. Smith

In defining the Greco-Roman banquet as a social institution, my emphasis will be neither on the types of foods people ate nor on the various meals that fit into a normal day, though each of these categories has social value in its own right. Rather I wish to identify and single out for study the specific form of meal that the ancients themselves saw as an occasion for significant social meaning. It is my contention that there was one type of meal that served as the basic model for all formal meals of significance in the Greco-Roman world. I define this meal model as the Greco-Roman banquet, and I view it as a complex and highly influential social institution.

The Banquet as Social Form

First let me clarify the terminology. What I am calling “banquet” is what Matthias Klinghardt calls the “communal meal” in his essay in [chapter one](#) of this volume. I prefer the term banquet in order to emphasize that this form of meal carried a set of social baggage that was well known to ancients. It can be characterized by the oft-quoted statement, “I have eaten but not dined today.”¹ To some scholars, the term banquet places too much emphasis on upper-class luxury.² In my view, that is exactly the point. No matter what the social class of the group that was dining at such a meal, what they aspired to was the symbolism of this special meal as an event of leisure and luxury.³

The Greco-Roman banquet is characterized most specifically by the practice of reclining. This practice was virtually universal throughout the Greco-Roman world as a marker for the formal banquet of significance.⁴ In the Greek tradition, such a banquet had two main courses. The first course was the *deipnon*, the eating course proper, a term which is translated “dinner” or “banquet.” The second course was the symposium (Greek: *symposion*) or “drinking party.” It was during the symposium that the entertainment of the evening would take place while the diners lingered over cups of wine (but wine mixed with water, which allowed for a full evening of “lingering”). Reclining is the posture for all of the meals of Jesus described in the gospels, which are thereby being pictured as firmly entrenched in the Greco-Roman banquet tradition.⁵

Recent scholarship has emphasized a marked distinction between the Greek and Roman forms of banquet.⁶ Older classical studies handbooks proposed that the Roman *cena/convivium* model was a copy of the Greek *deipnon/symposion* model. This interpretation is the standard one adopted by most classics scholars down to the present.⁷ Following their lead, it is the model adopted by Klinghardt and myself.⁸ Now that model has been significantly challenged, most especially in the major studies of Dunbabin and Roller. The new model proposes that, in the Roman banquet, wine drinking took place throughout the meal.⁹ This is the pattern described, for example, in Horace’s banquet of Nasidienus and in Petronius’ banquet of Trimalchio.¹⁰ This means that there was not an equivalent to the *symposion* per se; the Latin term *comissatio*, which has often been taken to be the Latin term for *symposion*, has been shown by Dunbabin and Roller not to have been used as an equivalent.¹¹ Indeed, Roller argues that while the *comissatio* was a drinking party, it was one that was divorced from the reclining banquet in the dining room. Rather it is most regularly used as a term for “an outdoor (drunken) revel through the streets.”¹²

Our New Testament data, however, complicate this matter. In 1 Corinthians 11:23–25, which is Paul’s version of the last supper tradition, the meal of Jesus is presented as following the *deipnon/symposium* model. Here Jesus first pronounces a benediction over bread. Then, “after the *deipnon* he took a cup of wine” (ὥσαύτως καὶ τὸ ποτήριον μετὰ τὸ δεῖπνῆσαι, 11:25). Paul presents this story in the context of a discussion about the meal of the Corinthian community, which he refers to as the “*deipnon* (banquet) of the Lord” (κυριακὸν δεῖπνον, 11:20). Clearly the Corinthian community, and by extension the churches of Paul throughout the eastern Mediterranean, were following a Greek banquet model for their community meal.

To be sure, both Dunbabin and Roller point to exceptions to the above rule for the Roman banquet. Dunbabin, for example, points out that a *magister bibendi* (“master of the drinking”), equivalent to the *symposiarch* in the Greek model, could be appointed at Roman banquets.¹³ Roller notes that Greek-style drinking at banquets, namely specifying a symposium at the end of the meal, is found in a few cases, but he proposes that these are rare exceptions to the rule.¹⁴ For the New Testament data, however, the Greek model would appear to dominate. Furthermore, even the Roman banquet model included the component of banquet conversation; it is simply relocated to the meal itself, as seen in the examples from Horace and Petronius quoted above.

The Social Significance of Reclining

Reclining for a meal was always fundamentally a mark of status. To designate other postures at the meal, such as sitting while others reclined, was an intentional indication of one’s lower status. Therefore, in traditional Greek terms, only free citizens could recline. Women (respectable women, that is), children, and slaves, if present at a banquet where their betters reclined, were expected to sit. In the Roman period there was some variation to this basic rule, so that, for example, respectable women were known to recline along with men. As emphasized in Roller’s study, posture at the meal was always fraught with issues of social status. Choice of posture at the banquet was never a trivial matter.¹⁵

The Archeology of the Banquet

Artistic representations, such as figured reliefs, wall paintings, and vase paintings, have provided a significant amount of data about the reclining banquet and its richly textured social context. Additional data are provided by the physical remains of ancient dining rooms, which indicate patterns for arranging the diners that remain remarkably stable in a variety of public and private contexts throughout the Greek and Roman periods. All such designs are marked by the relative small numbers of diners provided for (generally ca. 7 to 12) and the placement of the couches in such a way that all of the diners faced inward toward the other diners. This arrangement fits the pattern discussed frequently in the literature that specified that the diners should be arranged so that all can share in a common social event and a common conversation.¹⁶

The Greek style of dining room utilized couches designed primarily for one person, although, according to literary and pictorial data, two or more

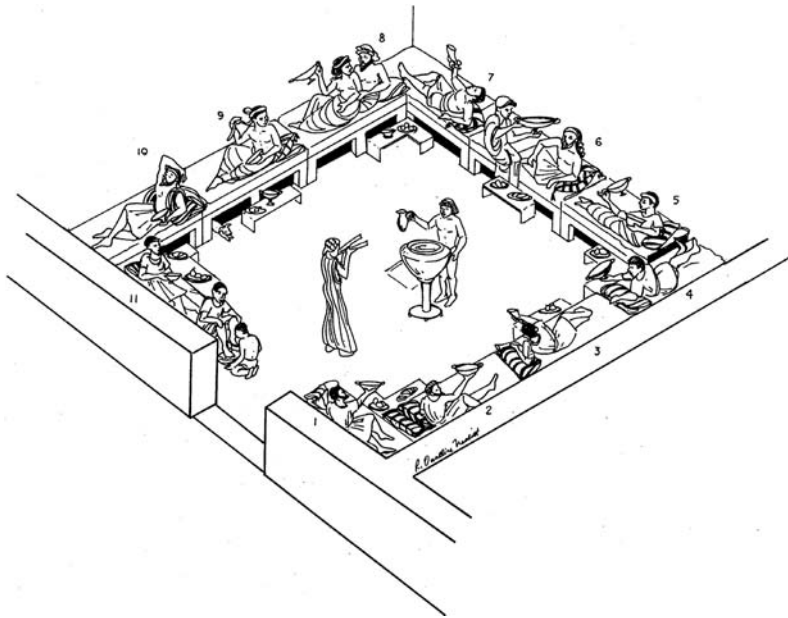


Figure 2.1 Greek Dining

Model of an 11-couch Greek-style dining room. © Dennis Smith; reprinted with permission from *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 16.

might share the same couch at times. In rooms designed for dining, the couches were arranged along the wall so that every diner would recline on their left elbow and face the rest of the dining group toward the interior of the room. Classic designs included 7-, 9-, and 11-couch rooms; the odd number arises from the fact that one couch had to be omitted to allow entrance for the servants to serve the tables. An example of this style is shown in [figure 2.1](#).

This drawing is a reproduction of an 11-couch room from the Greek classical period that was excavated at the sanctuary of Asclepius in Corinth. The artist has placed figures on the couches taken from a variety of Greek vase paintings from the same era. The Greek style of dining couch is known to have been used during the Roman period as well.

The classic Roman style of dining room is the triclinium. This was a 3-couch style, using a different style of couch. In this case each couch held a minimum of three diners, so that the classic number of diners at a triclinium setting was nine. Here also the couches were arranged in a form so that the

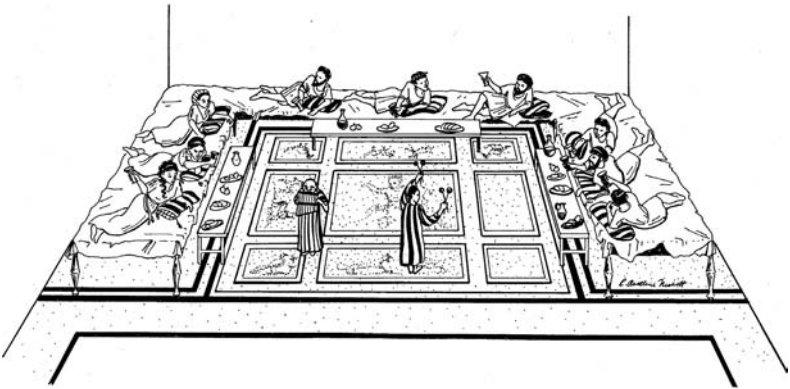


Figure 2.2 Roman Dining

Model of a Roman-style triclinium with the traditional nine diners. © Dennis Smith; reprinted with permission from *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 17.

diners all faced inward; in this case that form took the shape of the Greek letter “II”. An example is shown in [figure 2.2](#).

This drawing is a copy of a mosaic floor design from a second-century Roman villa which designates where the portable couches were to be placed. In the drawing, diners have been positioned on the couches to approximate the normal reclining arrangement. It should be noted that, while nine diners was the customary number, smaller triclinia are known from Pompeii and Herculaneum, and a larger triclinium, with spaces for up to 12 diners, has been excavated in a “clubhouse” of an association of builders in Ostia.

A third common style for the reclining banquet was the *stibadium*, the style that is pictured on the front cover of this book. Here the diners were arranged in a Greek *sigma* style, using the form of the *sigma* that was shaped like the English letter “C.” This dining arrangement could be put together with couches or by simply placing mats on the ground or floor. It had become a very common form by the 3rd to 4th centuries, and is the form used in the catacombs to picture Christian meals.¹⁷

Banquet Ideology

Embedded in the ancient banquet was a set of standards for the “proper meal” that I call “banquet ideology.” “The idea of the banquet” was a widely discussed concept in Greek and Roman sympotic literature. The categories of banquet ideology can be extrapolated from these discussions and

buttressed with parallel data from other genres, such as the statutes of associations as well as the archeological design of dining rooms. The validity and utility of the categories named below is exhibited in their ability to explain a comprehensive pattern in banquet practice in a variety of contexts.

Social Boundaries and Social Bonding

To dine together formed the dining group into a community whose identity was defined internally by means of social bonding and externally by means of social boundaries. By dining together the dining group separated itself from the outside world thus creating social boundaries. Sometimes this was not an especially stark boundary; civic groups, for example, dined together as a component of their common civic identity. In other cases, however, the meal intensified the community's sense of separation from the outside world. The Essenes of Qumran defined strict requirements for eligibility to participate in their "pure meal."¹⁸ Paul urged his Christian community to maintain strict banquet boundaries:

You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons (1 Cor 10:21).

Social bonding was especially symbolized by the sharing together of the components of the banquet. Plutarch spoke in the highest terms of the bonds created by the meal, referring to the "friend-making" power of the meal based on the shared wine and conversation: "A guest comes to share not only meat, wine, and dessert, but conversation, fun, and the amiability that leads to friendship" (*Quaest. conv.* 612D, 660B). Paul drew from the same meal ideology when he proclaimed: "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor 10:17). Social bonding at the meal provided the experiential component, and likely even the generative matrix, for Paul's theology of community.

Social Stratification versus Social Equality

These two categories functioned as mirror opposites. On the one hand, as part of the expected honor to be bestowed on the guest by the host at a "proper meal," the relative status of the guests, or social stratification, was to be marked by symbols embedded in meal practice. The act of reclining was in itself a mark of status, as noted in the discussion above. In addition, no matter what the arrangement of the diners might be, whether it was Greek style, the Roman triclinium, or the stibadium, the participants always knew which positions

were the highest and lowest in ranking. For example, the three couches of the triclinium (see [figure 2.2](#)) were designated, from the front right, the *locus summus*, or highest position, the *locus medius*, or middle position, and *locus imus*, or lowest position. Traditionally, the ranking proceeded to the right, with the number 1 position of the *locus summus* being the position of highest rank and the number 3 position of the *locus imus* being the position of lowest rank. However, at some point in time the ranking order changed so that the number 3 position of the *locus imus*, which came to be called the *locus consularis* (“the consul’s position”), was given the highest ranking.¹⁹

Also firmly embedded in banquet tradition was the value of social equality, which by definition was the opposite of social stratification. This category referred to the expectation that all diners were to be treated equally in all aspects of the meal. It functioned as a natural offshoot of social bonding. This meant that the food, the wine, the conversation, and any other aspects of the entertainment at the meal were to be shared equally by all. Even the act of reclining together represented the equality of the diners. This symbolism is referenced in the story of Jesus “reclining together with tax collectors and sinners”; the symbolism of this scene is that this category of social outcasts was being accepted with full equality at the table. On the other hand, the idea of social stratification was also referenced in a story in which Jesus draws on a popular anecdote about the “host’s nightmare” in which the guests are properly ranked around the table according to status only to be disrupted by a late-arriving guest who must be accommodated according to rank and who therefore causes the entire ranking order to be undone.

When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not recline at the highest position (μὴ κατακλιθῆς εἰς τὴν πρωτοκλισίαν), in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host, and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, “Give this person your place,” and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place (τὸν ἔσχατον τόπον) (Luke 14:8–9, NRSV modified by the author).

Social stratification and social equality coexisted in an uneasy tension in the banquet; in a sense, it meant that some were more equal than others. It was a subject of concern that was often addressed in the literature, as illustrated in the Jesus story above, and in an extended dialogue in Plutarch on the subject: “Whether the host should arrange the placing of his guests or leave it to the guests themselves.”²⁰ The inherent tension between social stratification and social equality, and the conversation it provoked at the table, provided Taussig with a model for his concept of “experimentation” at the meal.²¹

Social Obligation

Social obligation refers to the ethics of dining together, what we today might call “etiquette” but which to the ancients was a significant component of moral philosophy. “Symposium laws” or rules of behavior at the banquet are found as early as Plato and sparked a longstanding tradition of philosophical discussion that accompanied the reclining banquet throughout its history.²² This concept is also reflected in the statutes of the associations regarding banquet behavior.²³ Paul works from the same ethical template when he argues from the commensal unity of the community to specify the appropriate behavior toward the dining companions based on the principle of “building up” the community rather than breaking up the banquet through actions that serve the individual over the community.²⁴

Festive Joy

“Festive joy” is my translation of the term εὐφροσύνη, which was a common descriptive term for the banquet.²⁵ It refers to that which lies at the very heart of the meal event, namely enjoyment or celebration. In philosophical discourse, this concept is represented by the terminology of “pleasure,” which then became a guide for proper behavior at the banquet (social obligation); that is to say, proper behavior at the banquet is that which enhances the inherent pleasure or festive joy of all who are present.²⁶ In the statutes of associations, “good cheer” was invoked with the same meaning and function.²⁷

Even deities got into the act, emphasizing that “festive joy” was to characterize any meal at which they were invoked, as seen in this invitation to the cult banquet of Zeus Panamaros: “The god invites you to the sacred feast . . . in order that you may partake of the festivity (εὐφροσύνη) which he provides.”²⁸

Banquet Entertainment

In the Greek tradition, the symposium was set apart as the time for the entertainment of the evening, which was always a necessary and expected component of the banquet. A standard form of entertainment was music, which was referenced in a lyrical text from Sirach:

A ruby seal in a setting of gold is a concert of music at a banquet of wine.
A seal of emerald in a rich setting of gold is the melody of music with
good wine (Sir 32:5–6).

Notice that music is valued at the meal because of the “festive joy” it imparts to the occasion. At the Greek symposium, the flute girl was a fixture, both in the literature and in pictorial representations. In Plato’s symposium, a historic turning point is introduced when it is decided to dismiss the flute girl and spend the evening in conversation at the table.²⁹ Elevated conversation became a standard feature of the symposium and proved to be adaptable to a variety of conversation topics; for example, among the Jewish sages being referenced in Sirach, the topic of conversation at the dinner table was discourse on the Torah (9:15–16). Other forms of banquet entertainment included reading or performance of literary materials, singing, and other forms of discourse. Even the Roman banquet that excluded the symposium as a separate part of the event nevertheless included various forms of entertainment; in this case, the entertainment took place at the meal rather than during the drinking party following the meal. At the banquet of Trimalchio, for example, the serving of the food itself became a form of entertainment.

This component of the meal was ready-made to serve as the setting, and, once again, as the generative matrix, for the development of early Christian worship. Our earliest descriptive text describing Christian worship lists components that were at home in the banquet setting: “When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation” (1 Cor 14:26). Even more significant is the fact that the tradition that became the central focus of Christian worship, which came to be known as the Eucharist, began in the context of a meal at which the community had gathered to worship.

The Banquet as a Literary Tradition

What we know about ancient banquets is derived especially from literary resources. Indeed, there was an entire body of literature devoted to banquet miscellanea, most of which is incorporated into what we call symposium literature, broadly conceived. What is fascinating about this literature is the dynamic to which it witnesses between the meal as “imagined” and the meal as practiced.

On the one hand, most, if not all, of our descriptions of meals follow a literary model even though they often profess to be describing an actual meal. Plutarch admits as much when he specifically points out that his descriptions of meals with his family and friends are inspired by the tradition of symposium literature.³⁰ The prototypes of this literature were the symposia of Plato and Xenophon, both of which profess to be describing a meal at which Socrates was present. This model included both a narrative

component, the story about how the meal came about and progressed to its end, and a discourse component, using a variation of the Platonic dialogue. This model was copied in great detail over several centuries of symposium literature.³¹

While the meals described in this literature are not “actual,” the values that they reflect are, so that the literature was consulted as an authority for the actual practice of meals. It also provided a literary model for describing the proper form for actual meals, as seen, for example, in the proposal that the literary form that underlies the Mishnah description of the Jewish Passover meal is in fact the symposium literary form.³²

The connection of banquet and literature was also influential in the development of Christian worship, since certain literary forms developed with, or were produced by, their performance at meals. For example, Hal Taussig has proposed that Jesus stories likely originated as part of the storytelling tradition connected with meals.³³

The banquet was a social institution of the first order and permeated all levels of ancient life. Understanding better the form and ideology of the banquet will aid us in reconstructing the social realities of ancient life more accurately.

Notes

1. The full quotation is: “The Romans . . . are fond of quoting a witty and sociable person who said, after a solitary meal, ‘I have eaten, but not dined today,’ implying that a dinner always requires friendly sociability for seasoning” (Plutarch, *Quaest. conv.* 697C [LCL]).
2. This is Hal Taussig’s view. He prefers the term “Hellenistic festive meal” (*In the Beginning*, 21).
3. Note that Dunbabin also prefers the terminology of “banquet” to define this social type (*The Roman Banquet*).
4. Most recently, see Roller, *Dining Posture*.
5. See, for example, Mark 2:15, 6:39–40, 8:6, 14:3, 14:18, and parallels.
6. Roller, *Dining Posture*, 181–88, provides a helpful update on this discussion.
7. Roller, *Dining Posture*, 181 n. 2.
8. Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft*; Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*.
9. Dunbabin, *Roman Banquet*, 21; Roller, *Dining Posture*, 181.
10. Horace, *Sat.* 2.8; Petronius, *Sat.* 26–78. Cf. other examples in Roller, *Dining Posture*, 182–84.
11. Dunbabin, *Roman Banquet*, 20–22; Roller, *Dining Posture*, 184–88.
12. Roller, *Dining Posture*, 188.

13. *Roman Banquet*, 22. Note also the occurrence of symposiarch functionaries, operating under a variety of labels, in sources ranging from Sirach to Greco-Roman associations (see further Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*).
14. Roller, *Dining Posture*, 183–84.
15. Roller, *Dining Posture*, *passim*.
16. On the archeology of the banquet, see further Smith, “The House Church as Social Environment” and “Hospitality, the House Church, and Early Christian Identity.”
17. On the *stibadium* form, see especially Dunbabin, *Roman Banquet*, 43–46, 141–202.
18. 1QS 6:16–17; see further Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 152–58.
19. See further Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 17; Plutarch, *Quaest. conv.* 1.3.
20. *Quaest. conv.* 1.2 (615C–619A), discussed in Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 55–58.
21. See especially *In the Beginning*, 29–31, 145–71.
22. Discussed in Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 51–62.
23. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 90–131.
24. This is basically Paul’s core argument in 1 Corinthians 14, discussed in Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 200–14.
25. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 80–81.
26. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 55–62.
27. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 101.
28. Hatzfeld, “Inscriptions de Panamara,” 74:14; see further Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 81–84.
29. Plato, *Symp.* 176E.
30. *Quaest. conv.* 612D–E.
31. See especially Martin, *Symposion*.
32. As argued in the classic study by Stein, “The Influence of Symposia Literature”; see also Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 147–50.
33. *In the Beginning*, 138–39 and *passim*.

PART II

The Archeology of the Banquet

CHAPTER 3

What Kinds of Meals Did Julia Felix Have?

A Case Study of the Archeology of the Banquet

Carolyn Osiek

In 1755–1757, a large complex at Pompeii (2.4.1–12)¹ was excavated at the corner northwest across from the amphitheater, northeast from the *palestra*. On the front side of the property, it opens onto what is now called Via dell'Abondanza, one of the principal *decumani* of Pompeii. As was typical at the time, the excavators removed whatever mosaics and statuary they wished, then covered it all over again. In 1952–1953, the site was reexcavated and partially restored but never published, and is visible today more or less as restored then, with the inevitable deterioration that has happened to the structures in the intervening years.

It is the one of the largest complexes so far discovered at a Vesuvian city (see [figure 3.1](#))

The buildings cover between one-third and one-half of a double city block along the major street and a side street to the west, while the adjoining open space, probably cultivated then, completes the entire block. At some point, there were 12 different entrances to the various parts of the buildings. While some of the structures may be dated as early as the second century BCE, the conclusion of Christopher Parslow, the latest scholar to study the complex, is that it was refurbished after the destructive earthquake of 62 CE, and was in full use at the time of the eruption in 79 CE. To my knowledge,

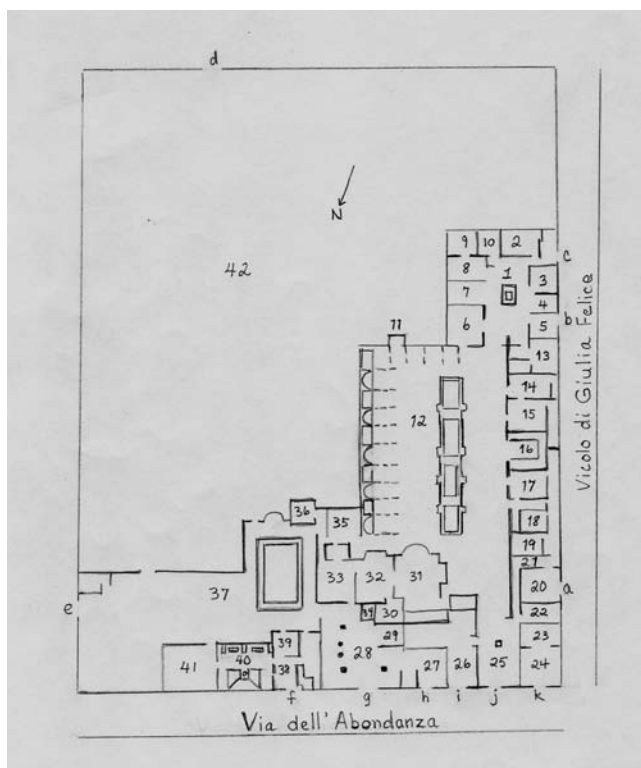


Figure 3.1 Julia Felix complex, plan by C. Osiek.

no archeologist who has studied the site has doubted that in the final phase its various parts were functioning together as one unit with several distinct components.

Some want to divide those components into three sections, for example, Maiuri and Sampaolo, but they do not agree on what those sections are. It seems clearer to speak of six distinct parts to this complex.

1. An Original Domus, Including Atrium 1, Surrounding Rooms, and Entrances b and c

Room 6 (see [figure 3.2](#)), the largest in this section other than the atrium, contains a *biclinium* with a large window out to the garden behind.

The walls in it and the surrounding rooms were colorfully painted and decorated, mostly with garlands, floral arrangements, and candelabras.



Figure 3.2 Julia Felix complex. Room 6 biclinium. Photo by David Balch.

Room 8 contained a painting of Apollo and the Muses, now in the Louvre. Room 7 is identified as a *tablinum* and rooms 5, 8, and 9 as *cubiculi*. Room 2 is a kitchen, indicating that dining activity was carried on in that living area and perhaps beyond. Predominant colors in the decoration are red in the atrium and *cubiculum* 98, white in *cubiculum* 9, blue in *biclinium* 5, and yellow in *cubiculum* 6. It is possible that the original entrance to most of the complex was at corridor 21, with staircase immediately beside it in room 20.² The use of room 20 is not clear; my own observation based on its size and the nature of door is that it was probably a stable. The original entrance b was in the last period closed up in favor of entrance c, which gives more direct access to the kitchen, room 2. This may give a clue about use of this space at that time. Perhaps it was the kitchen for a wider area, including room 16 and surroundings.

2. Room 25, with Its Own Atrium, and Adjoining Rooms and Entrances on Via dell'Abondanza

Room 25 contains a marble *impluvium* that probably held a fountain. Its walls were decorated with scenes of daily life in the forum, cut into pieces in the eighteenth century, and now in the National Museum³ From it open one large room (26) that is also accessible from the street, one small room (22), and corridor 21. Rooms 23 and 24 in the corner of this area are a shop and back room, accessible only from the street. In the larger of these rooms was a

wall painting with many figures, generally believed to be scenes of daily life in the forum. Room 26 gives access to the hypocaust of the caldarium, and thus is a *praefurnium* and service area.

3. Area 12, an Extensive Viridarium and Reception Space

The east wall of area 12 contains 10 niches, alternating circular and rectangular, with a separate niche at the end (11) thought to be an Isiac shrine, though nothing of its adornment survived the earlier excavations (see [figure 3.3](#)).

The walls of the whole niche area were plastered with rough finish to imitate a grotto. All around the niche areas on the east and south sides was an arbor supported by masonry columns in green paint. Near the south niche were found an expensive bronze tripod with three ithyphallic satyrs and a small statue of Priapus, along with some pieces of jewelry and household furnishings.⁴ In the center of area 12, a long narrow rectangular pool, often called a *euripus* in the literature (a canal, or long narrow passage for water), was used either as a fish pond or (less likely) as a swimming pool. The latter use has been suggested, but the space seems too shallow and narrow; rather, the rectangular area in space 37, adjacent to the bath complex and behind the *caupona*, is wider and deeper and was probably a swimming pool.



Figure 3.3 Julia Felix Complex, Area 12, *viridarium* and reception space, view from north to south, photo by Carolyn Osiek.

The west side of area 12 along the pool contains a series of elegant rooms facing out to the pool and garden area, behind a covered portico supported by 16 square columns in pseudo-Corinthian style. Rooms 18 and 14 contain no decoration and are therefore probably service areas, though room 14 looks from its location more likely to be another reception room. Room 16, which opens directly into the portico, contains a built-in *biclinium* (see [figure 3.4](#)) and an elaborate marble fountain.

It is decorated with Nilotic frescoes of crocodiles and pigmies engaged in various water activities. On either side wall is a niche for a small piece of statuary. The columns supporting the portico are slightly higher outside this room, reinforcing its centrality. Rooms 15 and 17 on either side of the *triclinium* room are beautifully painted but show no signs of permanent structures for meals. They could be reception rooms, or may have been used for meals with portable couches. If the latter is the case, then there were at least three dining rooms in a row, looking out on the pool and garden. The line of rooms 15 through 19 probably held a second floor with similar rooms, accessed through corridor 21 and/or by stairs at the end of the hall, destroyed by the first excavators.⁵ Sampaolo⁶ speculates that the original entrance to this part was at entrance a, and that a later remodeling reoriented it to face the major street at entrances j. But the relationship of atria 1 and 25 to the space between them is not clear, and will be discussed further below.



Figure 3.4 Julia Felix complex, Room 16, containing a *biclinium*, or two-sided *triclinium*. Photo by D. Balch.

4. A Bath Complex, Including Rooms 28–33

This is a complete bath complex, smaller than the women's section of the Forum Baths, but well fitted out. Entrance g opens onto area 28, a decorated peristyle with mosaic pavement and benches along the walls. The walls contain many paintings of peacocks, griffins, garlands, and still lifes. A number of nuisance graffiti were found on the walls, probably left by bored patrons awaiting their turn at the baths. At the southwest corner there were several cubicles partitioned off, and a small *laconicum* (steam bath, room 29). Room 28 leads to *frigidarium* (33), *tepidarium* (32), another *laconicum* (30), and *caldarium* (31). In the south niche of the *tepidarium* were found the marble legs of a tripod table. A trench ran around the outside of rooms 31 and 32, the *tepidarium* and *caldarium*, an architectural feature associated with later design.⁷ Room 36 is a latrine, and the rectangular structure in space 37, accessible from the peristyle of the baths (28), deeply indented with a shallow ridge all around, seems to have been a swimming pool. Maiuri speculates that the presence of privately operated baths in an affluent area indicates the degree of financial upheaval after the earthquake of 62 CE.⁸ Parts of the larger Forum and Stabian baths were apparently unusable after the earthquake, so the presence of a bathing establishment so near the amphitheater would be a smart venture likely to draw much business.

5. A Caupona with a Dining Area

Entrance f opens onto a *thermopolium*, which is also the entrance to a small *caupona* with several small rooms, a kitchen, and one large room (room 40) containing both a *triclinium* and permanent tables and benches in masonry for eating sitting upright (see figures 3.5 and 3.6).

A window in the east wall of bath peristyle 28 also opens onto this area. From this room there is access to outdoor space 37 with its swimming pool, also accessible from entrance e. At the south side of the pool area is a niche that contained a fountain. The rest of the open space 37 is conjectured by Richardson to be a *palestra*, though it certainly would not have been a very large one.⁹ It is surrounded by a high wall. Room 41, accessible from space 37, was covered by a light roof of beams that probably served as a trellis, thus an outside dining area almost as large as room 40, though no traces of couches or benches remain. They were probably of wood.

6. Area 42

This is a very large open space intended not only for cultivation but also for access from the various building areas, perhaps also an orchard.



Figure 3.5 Julia Felix complex, Room 40, north side: dining area with triclinium for reclining. Photo by David Balch.



Figure 3.6 Julia Felix complex, Room 40, south side: dining area with benches for sitting. Photo by David Balch.

A painted inscription on the principal façade provides the way to understanding how the various parts of the complex are related (CIL 4.1136=ILS 5723):

IN· PRAEDIS· IULIAE· SP· F· FELICIS
 LOCANTUR
 BALNEUM· VENERIUM· ET· NONGENTUM ·TABERNAE·
 PERGULAE
 CENACULA· EX· IDIBUS· AUG· PRIMIS· IN· IDUS· AUG· SEXTAS·
 ANNOS· CONTINIUOS· QUINQUE
 S· Q· D· L· E· N· C

“To let, in the estate of Julia Felix, daughter of Spurius: elegant baths for respectable people, shops with upper rooms, and apartments. From the 13th August next to the 13th August of the sixth year, for five continuous years. The lease will expire at the end of the five years.”¹⁰

Praedium: many have called this property a villa, but given the multiple-use nature of it, *praedium* should best be translated “estate” or “manor,” which can be either in the country or an urban context (cf. Cicero, *Rosc. Am.* 15.43; Juvenal, *Sat.* 9.54; Acts 28:7 Vg). Though her name, combining an elite family name with one typical of slaves, would have been thought to be that of a freedwoman, Julia Felix is in fact freeborn but “illegitimate,” that is, probably her mother was technically a “concubine.”¹¹ She notes her filiation proudly on the advertisement as a step up from freedwoman status. She is the proprietor who advertises rental possibilities on the wall of her property. Whether at the time of the destruction of Pompeii the various parts of the property were indeed rented or whether the advertisement was still in force is not known. The first thing our proprietor has to rent is a *balneum venerium et nongentum*. While earlier interpreters jumped to conclusions either about Julia’s religious dedication to Venus or the lascivious nature of her baths, it is now understood that *venerium* means simply “luxurious.” *Nongentum*, normally meaning 900, is a bit more of a puzzle until brought into play with Pliny (*Nat.* 33.7.31) where the term refers to important citizens who keep the urns containing the ballots in civic elections, hence, “big shots.”¹²

Julia Felix also wants to rent out *tabernae*, *pergulae*, and *cenacula*. It is noteworthy that the list of what she wants to rent does not include a *domus*, as is the case in another rental notice in the *insula* Arriana Polliana in Reg. 6.6.1, by one Gn. Alleius Nigidius Maius, who equally wants to rent out *tabernae*, *pergulae*, *cenacula*, and *domus* as well.¹³ This suggests that she may have wanted to continue to live in the *domus* area around atrium 1 in the back, off the side street.

It is not easy to distinguish *tabernae* from *pergulae*, though apparently the readers of the advertisement were expected to know the difference. Both originally refer to a hut, shed, stall, or small shop, notably one that projects from a wall. But both have many other distinct meanings, including market or passage. One meaning for a *taberna* is akin to that of a *caupona* or *popina*, namely an inn or tavern (cf. Horace, *Sat.* 1.4.71; Plautus *Men.* 2.3.81; Cicero, *Inv.* 2.4.14; Suetonius, *Aug.* 4; Acts 28:15 Vg). So the advertisement may be referring with *tabernae* to shop areas at entrances k and i, but more likely to the eating establishment at entrance f.¹⁴

A *pergula* is also originally some kind of shed or stall, hence a shop or porch, or an open space in which various kinds of activities can take place, including lectures (Suetonius, *Aug.* 94.12; here it is clearly on an upper level, cf. *cenaculum* below). It can also mean an arbor covered with vines (Columella, *Arb.* 4.21; 11.2.). Again, the reference could be to the shop area at entrance 1, but more likely to room 4, accessed from open space 5 in the eating complex, an open area that may have been covered with wooden lattices. It is also possible that the outside décor around the formal dining area around rooms 80, 83, and 86 is the referent.

A *cenaculum* is more clearly a dining room, though usually on an upper level, so that the word comes to mean not only dining room but also upper storey, upper room, and simply rental apartment, not necessarily on an upper floor, but with upper-class connotations with regard to quality.¹⁵ As stated above, Maiuri speculates that there were stairs in corridor 21 or the space behind room 15, to an upper storey, and that they were destroyed by the original excavators. There may also have been an upper storey over the eating establishment around the corner at entrance f (over rooms 38–41). If these upper areas contained dining facilities, they would be proper *cenacula*. This still leaves us, however, without a clear reference in the advertisement to the dining and social area 15–17, the most elaborate of the entertainment centers in the complex. Perhaps they are included in the *cenacula* or perhaps *pergulae*, since they are a single row of rooms with wide openings to the peristyle. In sum, the advertisement speaks of three different kinds of rental areas, but it is impossible to know which parts of the property are referenced by which terms.

From the archeological evidence remaining, we see that there are three distinctively different dining areas in the building complex. The first is the *biclinium* in the *domus* area (room 6), with view out the window to the large garden area 42. This section seems separable from the rest of the complex, and has a modest entrance on a side street. If we have read the advertisement correctly, it is possible that this space is not to be rented but to remain in private use. The second is the beautiful *triclinium* with fountain and Nilotic

decoration (room 16), flanked on either side by decorated rooms to be used for reception or further dining facilities with moveable furniture. The third is the multiple-use area at entrance f, where, adjacent to a kitchen, both *triclinium* and table and seats are built into the floor (rooms 38–41). All three dining areas at the time of the eruption seem to have belonged to the same person, Julia Felix, who wants to (or perhaps already did) rent out the second and third areas, as well as the bath complex in between areas two and three.

If these are correct conclusions, nothing else like it existed among the discovered remains of Pompeii or of any other Roman city, to my knowledge. So let us look for other, more familiar explanations for this property. While originally there may well have been several houses or businesses on the block, as stated above, the few archaeologists who have examined the site agree that in its final form from after 62, it was all one complex. But does the advertisement on the front façade perhaps have no relationship to the use of the buildings?

One possibility is that it was an extensive private dwelling. Other large estates are known in Pompeii, for example, the House of Pansa (House of Gn. Allaeus Nigidius Maius, 6.6.1), which occupies an entire *insula* of regular size. This means the property is half the size of that of Julia Felix, which occupies a double-size *insula*. The original atrium of the House of Pansa, built in classic style, opens to a larger peristyle and an extensive garden. Originally built as a single family residence, it was later divided into smaller units for rental. The same is true of the large and famous Villa of the Mysteries outside the Herculaneum Gate at the northwest corner of the city, named for the small side room in which the murals are thought to illustrate a Dionysiac initiation ceremony.

The House of Loreius Tiburtinus (or D. Octavius Quarto, 2.5.2), only two blocks down from Julia Felix's property, also has shops outside and a nucleus of atrium surrounded by living quarters giving access onto an open terrace and extensive gardens with water channels running through both terrace and gardens. Like the House of Pansa, this property is half the size of that of Julia Felix. A few luxurious houses had private baths, for example, the House of the Menander (1.10.4). Here the spacious and high-ceilinged atrium gives access to a magnificent peristyle, off which at an angle perpendicular to the entrance is a very large main *triclinium* flanked by reception rooms and service areas. On the opposite side of the peristyle garden is a private bath complex, though considerably smaller than that of Julia Felix, just large enough for two or three persons at one time.

Returning to the *praedium* of Julia Felix, the group of rooms around atrium 1 is by itself a modest-sized *domus* that could be self-contained, with a

clearly designated dining room (6) and kitchen (2), or it could have expanded into the garden area 12 and thus have a second dining and entertainment area, rooms 15–17, alongside a very pleasant garden with flowing water and decorative statues in the niches on the opposite side. Luxurious houses with more than one dining area are not unknown. This leaves unresolved the relationship of this large *domus* to the rest of the buildings. It would leave atrium area 25 with entrance j very small, with few viable rooms, unless it originally stretched out to the northwest in the area that now contains the baths. Of this we have no evidence.

Alternately, garden area 12 with its accompanying dining and social areas could have been part of the *domus* beginning with atrium 25. In this case, the structure of that house would be something similar to that of Loreius Tiburtinus/D. Octavius Quarto, where, from a modest atrium, the rest of the space opens to a garden that stretches longitudinally along the block. But as the evidence stands now, there would be no living space around the atrium. The front part of room 26 could at one time have been part of the living area off atrium 25, but was later incorporated into the service area of the baths, and now gives access to the hypocaust. All rooms meant for habitation would have to be along the row of rooms 15–17 opening onto the rectangular garden area.

If the baths were originally built for only the private use of a single household, they are much larger than the relative size of the accompanying *domus* would suggest. The large peristyle waiting area with benches would also be difficult to explain. In a private *domus*, why would users need to wait before entering the baths? More likely, they were built for private ownership but public use. Moreover, none of this explains the relationship of these two hypothetical *domus* or the baths to dining areas 38–41 with open outside area and pool 37. Arguably, this could originally have been an independently structured *taberna*, or one intended to be joined to the baths next door.

Thus the possibilities for private residential use are mixed. There could originally have been two distinct living areas, beginning with atrium 1 and atrium 25, with space 12 and its adjoining rooms possibly built as part of, or later connected to, either of those areas. But as the whole complex stood in the final phase of its existence, this does not work, for several reasons. First, entrance b was closed and only entrance c used to access atrium area 1: the social entrance was closed and the service entrance, closer to the kitchen, was either opened or continued as exclusive access to this *domus* area. This suggests a service function even to atrium area 1. Second, the baths and dining areas 38–41 do not fit in such a picture but must be explained some other way.

If we then think about possibilities for more communal use, the most obvious would be that it was the center and meeting place of a *collegium* or some other kind of association.

There are sufficient remains of such buildings that their general forms are known. From Italy to Athens, Delos, and Pergamum, certain types emerge. These associations were characterized by not only regular business meetings but also regular, usually monthly, feasts together in their meeting place, at which music, dancing, and other forms of entertainment often appeared, along with sacrifice. To accommodate these activities, either there is one large space for congregating and group dining, or a series of dining rooms in which smaller groups can feast simultaneously and in similar fashion. The other important factor is the indication of religious activities that were essential ingredients in the life of the association: an altar or some kind of identifiable religious space.¹⁶

The headquarters of the fullers' guild (*fullones*) at Pompeii was impressively located at the Forum, proclaiming their importance and even more, that of their patron, Eumachia, one of the leading figures of the city, the same who left an imposing funerary monument for her *familia* outside the city in the Via Nuceria cemetery. Constructed sometime after 22 CE, the building of the fullers was one of the largest in the area, of comparable size to the basilica and the Temple of Apollo on the other side of the Forum. Its façade featured a double order of columns. The open area inside was surrounded by a two-storied portico on three sides with three niches at the far end. The façade dedication (*CIL* 10.813) to *Concordia Augusta* (a title for Livia) suggests that the central niche contained a statue either of her or of Augustus. On the southeast corner of the building, by the back entrance from the Via dell'Abondanza, a more completely preserved inscription (*CIL* 10.810) identifies the patron as Eumachia L F, public priestess, who erected the building in her own name and that of her son, M. Numistrius Fronto, dedicating it to *Concordia Augusta*. It has been suggested that the building design may have been modeled on the Portico of Livia in Rome, of which today only a few fragments remain.

The building is so large and so imposing in its location that it must have been destined primarily not for meetings of the guild but for public use, as a market of wares sold by the guild members: wool, cloth, and dyed fabrics. Yet it clearly held cult statues at the back. The state of the building does not render any information about guild meeting activities. Surely, they must have met—and dined—somewhere in the building, but we do not know where.

At the junction of *Cardo* III and the *Decumanus Maximus* in Herculaneum, the meeting room of the Augustales was nothing like the size of the fullers'

building at Pompeii, but probably was not intended for any kind of public use. It is a large rectangular hall, 13.5 by 15.7 m. with roof supported by four columns. The statuary and part of the floor were removed by the eighteenth-century excavators. In the middle of one wall, slightly raised on two steps, is an area for religious cult. Fourth-style paintings of Hercules, Juno, Minerva, and others adorn the walls of this area, which is set off from the rest of the space by walls on either side that reach from the back wall to two of the supporting columns. An inscription found on another inside wall of the building records the first banquet held at the dedication of the building. There are no indicators of dining arrangements in the open hall. They may have been removed at an earlier date. Otherwise, the dining arrangement was makeshift, set up for each occasion. Neither is there indication of a kitchen on the premises, but that is also true of the builders' association building below, which surely did have meals on the premises.

The meeting place of the grain measurers' guild at Ostia by the second century included a large meeting room, a courtyard with a well, and a temple to Ceres Augusta, their patron divinity. The floor of the hall contains a mosaic of the members working in their profession.¹⁷ In the same city, the well-known meeting place of the builders' association on the main *decumanus* has two front rooms that were probably shops, flanking a main entrance into a large peristyled area, at the end of which was a dais that would have been a sanctuary with cult statues and altar, though nothing remains there today. On the east side was a succession of four dining rooms with built-in *triclinia*, each large enough for nine to twelve people.¹⁸ The rooms across the peristyle against the opposite wall are smaller and were probably for storage. Outside the back door perpendicular to it was a good-sized latrine, accessible from the small back street. There was a second storey with access by a staircase in the southeast corner. Within the building are at least three staircases, one immediately accessible from the street. This suggests that above the first floor meeting area arose several stories, perhaps of the kind of apartment buildings typical of Ostia in the period.

Here in Ostia, we see the two types of association buildings. That of the grain measurers has a large open space for group dining on movable couches. That of the builders has open space only in the ambulatory around the central peristyle, but contains four separate dining rooms side by side. The next storey may have been a large open meeting room, but no evidence remains. In both cases, however, there is some kind of temple or sanctuary for religious use. Both buildings probably date to no earlier than the second century.

At Misenum on the Bay of Naples, the building of a *collegium* of Augustales was discovered in 1968 partially submerged, since it is now about

one meter below sea level. The remnants of this association also date to the second century. The site had to be drained before excavation, a challenging engineering task. The excavation yielded a number of statues and statue bases with inscriptions containing important information about the life of the organization. All excavated materials are now in the new Archaeological Museum of the Campi Flegrei housed in the Castello Aragonese in Baiae. The precinct of the organization consisted of a building divided into four spaces: a front entrance area, in which nearly all the dedicatory inscriptions were found, a central hall, and two side halls. The central hall, rectangular in shape, was located on a slightly higher level, accessed by four steps. At its far end was an apse with semicircular seating and a statue base in the center. The floor mosaic pattern of long narrow strips with nothing on either side suggests a dining area with removable couches. The use of the two side rooms is uncertain. No floor decoration was found in them, and they were perhaps for storage or for informal social gatherings. If the central hall was not used for dining as well as religious activities, dining may have taken place in one or both of the side halls. Again, halls for meeting and dining, along with a cult center, characterize the arrangement of space within the building.¹⁹

Outside of Italy, a good number of inscriptions but few meeting centers of guilds or associations have been preserved. At the sacred island of Delos in the Cyclades, earlier during the Hellenistic period, the merchants and shippers from Berytus had established a meeting place in a many-roomed building complex with its cult of Poseidon. The building was either constructed or adapted before 152 BCE and remained in the use of the guild until it was destroyed in 69 BCE. A large peristyle courtyard gave access to several smaller rooms. A series of small cubicles were cultic in use. By the final period, one of these cubicles was dedicated to Roma and another to Poseidon, patron god of the guild, the others probably to other homeland gods.²⁰ Here again, the pattern is meeting space and prominent worship space.

In the upper city of Pergamon in Asia, a side street in a residential area on the southern slope gives access behind a row of shops to the sanctuary of the association of *boukoloι*, or herdsman. The hall is rectangular, 24 by 10 meters. There are built-in couches around all four sides except at the entrance on the south side and a cult niche opposite the entrance. The couches are one meter high and two meters deep, with a small marble shelf on which to place food and drink. The couches can accommodate up to 70 persons reclining with feet to the wall and faces to the front. At intervals under the couches are open places probably intended for storage. Beef, pig, and poultry bones were discovered in the floor, some from feasting and

some from sacrifice. The whole room was plastered and painted, the remnants of the paintings indicating Dionysiac scenes. Two altars were found in or near the building.²¹ Here dining and sacrifice come together in one room, as at the centers of the Augustales in Herculaneum and Misenum.

Yet another building of an association, this one also apparently dedicated to Dionysos, was found west of the acropolis in Athens, between the Pnyx and the Areopagus. The building consisted of a large hall, 18 by 11 meters, with two rows of columns and an altar area at the east end within a square apse. The group, the Iobacchoi, inscribed their rules on a column (*IG* 2.2.1368). Their new priest at that time, Claudius Herodes, is thought to be identified with the wealthy patron Claudius Herodes Attikos, who died in 178 CE. Their meetings were frequent, on the ninth of the month, the annual feast, and on other Bacchic feast days, “and if there is any occasional feast of the god,” and at the death of member. Gatherings consisted of speeches, sacrifices, libations, and feasting in honor of Dionysos.²² There is no archeological evidence of dining or feasting here, but, like the large open room of the Augustales at Herculaneum, there is plenty of space for moveable dining facilities.

None of these spatial descriptions seems to match the spaces at the *praedium* of Julia Felix. There is no clear temple area. Seemingly the only space allotted for religious use is the small *sacellum* of Isis in the isolated niche at the south end of the garden, though certainly there must have been libations and sacrifices ubiquitously at meals held in the various dining rooms. That niche (11) at the south end of the garden is off-center, under an extended arbor, and with little space in front of it, and so unlikely to be intended as gathering area for any kind of group worship. There is no evidence of any further temple space in the entire complex.

Nor is ownership and use by an association consonant with the advertisement posted on the façade of the *praedium*. Dennis Smith²³ cites a Hellenistic example of the association of *orgeones* of the Hero Egretes, from 307 to 306 BCE (*SIG* 1097=*IG* 22.2499), where the association leases part of its property to a private user, Diognetus, with the stipulation that on the appropriate feast days certain parts of the property (*oikia*) be available to the association, including *cella* and its accessory room, the kitchen, couches, and two table settings. This property must not be in great shape, for the contract specifies that Diognetus is allowed to bring in his own doors and roof, and to take them away when the lease expires. Here is a Greek association seemingly in control of its own property. (Later, under Roman law, however, corporate ownership of property was a legal conundrum, and it is probable that in the first century CE the property administered and used by an association was really held in the name of the patron or a prominent member.²⁴)

Our case appears to be the opposite: a single private owner wants to lease out nearly the whole property, including the various dining areas and the baths. Her leaser might turn out to be a *collegium* or association of some kind. But I do not think that we have any examples of banqueting and religious associations operating *tabernae* or baths for their members.

Where else do we find *triclinium* or *biclinium* in the same room with tables and benches? I have not made a thorough study of the remains of other *tabernae* but do not remember such a configuration. There are several examples in Pompeii of *tabernae* or *caupona*e with *thermopolium* in the front room and *triclinium* in a back room (e.g., 1.2.24; 1.8.8). It is quite likely in such cases that there were also moveable table and bench or chair arrangements in the same establishment. But in the same room? There are also several examples of paintings in such establishments, showing customers sitting at tables, for example, the *caupona* of Via di Mercurio, 6.10.1,²⁵ the *caupona* of Salvius, 6.14.35–36,²⁶ and a late third-century sarcophagus relief from Isola Sacra.²⁷ The only other place I have seen archeological evidence of both together is in burial contexts, notably the catacombs of Malta, where a semi-circular structure for *stibadium* dining inside the catacomb itself is sometimes found with benches built into either side or across the aisle (see figures 3.7 and 3.8).

In these cases, the benches are probably either for children or for slaves of the family who partake of the funerary banquet but in a less formal pose.



Figure 3.7 Stone-carved *stibadium* for reclining. St. Agatha Catacomb, Malta. Photo by C. Osiek.



Figure 3.8 M Stone-carved benches located in same room as the *stibadium* in figure 3.7. Photo by C. Osiek

There is a mid-first-century sarcophagus panel from Amiternum that shows both types of eating facilities in the same room, much as it appears in room 40 of Julia Felix's property.²⁸ Here six well-dressed men dine reclining on couches around a tripod table, while six others, similarly dressed, sit around a similar tripod table. Two servants between the two groups wait on both groups; one walking toward the recliners with cup in hand, the other looking toward the sitters. If this were a depiction of an informal dining scene such as would be found in a public eating establishment, it would fit exactly the setting in our room 3. Such depictions of eating scenes from inns are not unknown on funerary monuments, for example, the one from Isola Sacra referred to above. But in the Amiternum example, all diners, whether on couches or at table, are attired in togas. While earlier, sitting to eat was a sign of old-fashioned simplicity, reclining was a practice of luxury and often elite status. Thus for Dunbabin, this depiction is of a formal banquet with two grades of dining arrangements based on social status, conspicuously portrayed on the sarcophagus of the deceased.²⁹ It would be worthwhile to pursue this double dining arrangement to see if it can be found in other settings.

The only conclusion that seems possible to draw about this building complex is that an enterprising businesswoman³⁰ who has come into possession of an entire city block, by what means we do not know, was attempting to lease most of the property for five years, perhaps keeping the *domus* in

the south corner for herself. In the words of Christopher Parslow, the most recent scholar to study the complex:

My working thesis is that what we see today is not a villa (it wasn't called that in the sign on the façade) but was designed to be a semi-public "entertainment complex" with baths, gardens, and dining rooms accessible for a fee. The bath complex certainly was always open to the public, comparable to the small neighborhood bath complexes we read about in Rome, and to others elsewhere in Pompeii . . . We don't know when Julia Felix actually lived (the baths are Augustan in date), or how or when she came upon these properties.³¹

Nor do we know why she wanted to rent out these spaces for five years to someone else, nor whether she envisioned different leasers taking on different parts of the property. Perhaps she was growing tired of administering the whole complex herself. Whether the advertisement was new and she had not yet secured a lease, or whether it was old and the leaser(s) were already in place in the building, we shall never know. However, it does seem that the most likely conclusion to draw is that Julia Felix or perhaps a prior owner from whom she purchased or inherited the property, fixed it up for multiple uses, including bathing and several different types of dining, all intended for private service of the public through rental or fee-paying use. If an association of some kind did rent the property from her, they would in turn probably have done the same thing with the baths and *taberna*, namely operate them for public use, while reserving the rest of the property for their own use. Such an arrangement, however, would be unique.

Notes

1. In *CIL* and some older literature, this block is numbered 2.7. I have not been able to ascertain when or why the change of numbers. A query to Andrew Wallace-Hadrill yielded the answer: "This happens at Pompeii!"
2. Sampaolo, "Villa," 184–185.
3. Sampaolo, "Villa," 113–134, 252–257; Richardson, *Pompeii*, 295.
4. Richardson, *Pompeii*, 296.
5. Maiuri "Due iscrizioni," 295–296.
6. Sampaolo, "Villa," 184.
7. Richardson, *Pompeii*, 294.
8. Maiuri, "Due Iscrizioni," 297–298.
9. Richardson, *Pompeii*, 295.
10. Translation, Cooley and Cooley, *Sourcebook*, 171.

11. The ascription *Sp F* (*Sp* for the name *Spurius*) is a euphemism for birth outside legal Roman *justum matrimonium*. It did not necessarily or even probably carry a social stigma. It simply meant that there was a discrepancy in the social statuses of the parents, one probably a citizen and the other not, so that legal marriage was not possible. Great numbers of persons in Roman cities must have been in the same position. See Rawson, "Roman Concubinage and Other De Facto Marriages"; Osiek and MacDonald, *A Woman's Place*, 23.
12. See discussion in Maiuri, "Due iscrizioni," 292–94.
13. *CIL* 4.138; Maiuri, "Due iscrizioni," 296.
14. In spite of numerous efforts, I am unable to find a clear distinction between the terms *taberna*, *caupona*, and *popina* when used of a privately owned public eating and drinking establishment. Classicists use them interchangeably. A *caupona* sometimes includes rental accommodation. *Taberna* sometimes has a more general usage of shop or stall, but it too comes to mean the same as the other two words. According to Lewis and Short (*Latin Dictionary*) *taberna* is a synonym for *caupona*, and *popina* is a synonym for *caupona* and *taberna*.
15. Frier, "Rental Market," 28.
16. Philip Harland, *Associations*, highlights the essential ingredient of religious worship in the life of associations, esp. pp. 59–77.
17. Harland, *Associations*, 63, with photo and plan, p. 64.
18. Photos of the best-preserved of these dining rooms are common, for example, Harland, *Associations*, fig. 13, p. 67, and Dunbabin, *Roman Banquet*, fig. 51, p. 97.
19. An unusual feature of the life of the association, attested in the inscriptions, is that the leadership was dominated by one Q. Cominius Abascantus whose patronage in the association and the city included his wife, Nymphidia Monime, a freedwoman. On his death, his widow Nymphidia was adlected into membership in her own right, in 149 CE, the first known example of a woman admitted into the *Augustales*.
20. Harland, *Associations*, 65–69.
21. Harland, *Associations*, 78–80.
22. Harland, *Associations*, 81–83.
23. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 94; see also Ferguson and Nock, "The Attic Orgeones."
24. See the extended discussion on this subject in Waltzing, *Corporations* (2.3, pp. 432–441), who finds the following ways in which corporate bodies could hold property: 1) property bequeathed to the state for accomplishment of a civil responsibility (rare); 2) *consecratio et dedicatio*, goods belonging to a god; 3) property held by a *societas*, legally understood as personal property of many individuals; and 4) civil personification in *jus privatum*, a more limited form of ownership than that of a real person. Others, for example, Richard Saller in private conversation, are not so sure about the security of these claims in the first century. By the third century, the question enters into the status of the so-called church-owned property, for example, churches and cemeteries; Osiek, "Roman and Christian Burial," 264–69.

25. PPM 4.1005; Dunbabin, *Roman Banquet*, fig. 41, p. 81.
26. PPM 5.366–71.
27. Dunbabin, *Roman Banquet*, fig. 42, p. 83.
28. Dunbabin, *Roman Banquet*, fig. 40, p. 80.
29. *Roman Banquet*, 81–82.
30. The involvement of elite women in property transactions has been studied, and the presence of women in business at Pompeii is well known, but I know of no extensive studies of such nonelite businesswomen, except two unpublished papers by Roy Bowen Ward and Caroline Dexter.
31. Electronic correspondence with David Balch, 12/3/2005.

PART III

Who Was at the Greco-Roman
Banquets?

CHAPTER 4

Social and Political Characteristics of Greco-Roman Association Meals

Richard S. Ascough

“For the Roman aristocracy, banquets are of the essence.”¹ Not just the elite, however, held banquets. Among the lower orders many banquets were attended, often through membership in one or more of the associations ubiquitous at that time. Greek and Roman associations brought together men or, occasionally, women for some shared purpose, generally with a membership of 10–50, although a few associations were much larger (sometimes in the hundreds).² In antiquity, a good portion of the urban population were members of one or more such associations.³

Communal meals and banquets were a key part of Greco-Roman associations as is clear from literary, architectural, and epigraphic evidence.⁴ Meals were held at regular intervals, with special meals at points of celebration or bereavement among members. Often wealthy members or patrons were honored through banquets, festivals, and *sportulae* of food or money. One’s portion at these meals depended on one’s rank, while rules for behavior and penalties for their contravention were recorded in inscriptions and enforced as a means of social control. Occasions for banquets and the place and manner of dining were regulated through association bylaws.⁵

As a community of individuals gathered as a collective, the organization of an ancient association is analogous to the political organization of a state, having its own properties, finances, and an internal hierarchy of offices.⁶ The association has been viewed as a “petit cité” that equally allows

citizens of all social groups to participate in a state-like entity with its own hierarchy and social structures.⁷ Analysis of their meals, rituals, and other collective activities and values suggests that associations were autonomous in their structure and had their own internal public space. At the same time, they were part of the urban structure of Roman society. As “networking groups” they played a role as alternative space for political, social, and religious networking.⁸

Various types of associations evolved from the ancient political clubs (*thiasoi*, *orgeones*) of banqueting citizens and came to include socioeconomic support groups with alien and noncitizen members by the late fourth and third centuries BCE. At this time, associations focused predominantly on fellowship (*synousia*), brokered by common meals and social, judicial, and financial support.⁹ By Roman times there exists evidence of a diversity of professional and nonprofessional (social and/or religious) associations. Throughout their evolution, associations morph from political groups to social groups back to political groups and so on, all the time carrying with them characteristics of both social gatherings and (potentially) politically active groups (it is this latter aspect that most troubled the Romans). Due to this evolutionary yet cyclical morphology between the social and political it remains difficult for scholars clearly to classify associations as either one or the other.¹⁰ Because meals play a part in both the socioreligious aspects of associations and the politicoeconomic aspects, we will explore each in turn below.

Social Characteristics of Association Meals

In his short book on associations in Greco-Roman Egypt, Brashaer uses anthropological studies to argue that humans have an instinctive need to form associations that goes back long before Greco-Roman times.¹¹ As they turned from hunting in groups to settling communities, humans continued to fill their need for group identity by forming associations, albeit of various types (professional, self-help, religious). Examination of group behavior in *AGRW* 28 (5 BCE) and in other texts leads Brasher to conclude that the formation of associations primarily for social purposes within the cults of Egypt marks their secularization in Greco-Roman times.¹² This, however, drives an anachronistic wedge between two inseparable aspects of ancient group life—social activities and religious devotion. This division cannot be sustained.¹³ For example, the ‘*kline*,’ or dining fraternity, of Sarapis in the third-century CE Egypt, offered opportunities for socializing and dancing, commemoration of events such as marriage of coming of age, and worship.¹⁴ As Liu has ably argued,

Feasts were occasions when religion and social life closely intertwined. Religious rituals, including sacrifices, often preceded or accompanied the banquets. In fact, in many cases, religious rituals and banquets were simply different stages of the same events.¹⁵

Commensality has been defined as “a gathering aimed to accomplish in a collective way some material tasks and symbolic obligations linked to the satisfaction of a biological individual need.”¹⁶ Although all human beings are constrained to eat by biological necessity, eating in the company of others represents a social choice. “Like sex, the taking of food has a social component, as well as a biological one. Food categories therefore encode social events.”¹⁷ The range of company available for meal companionship is most often linked to the preexisting social groups within which an individual is located, and often the subgroups within a group will require particular obligations around meals. Put another way, meals become a way of defining the group’s boundaries—who is “inside” a group and who is on the “outside.”¹⁸

At a meal, the food itself becomes part of the “hidden transcript” and encodes particular messages, most notably the “pattern of social relations being expressed.”¹⁹

[D]rinks are for strangers, acquaintances, workmen, and family. Meals are for family, close friends, honoured guests. The grand operator of the system is the line between intimacy and distance.²⁰

In particular, dietary restrictions play a part in this encoding. When one examines the classifications of Leviticus

a very strong analogy between table and altar stares us in the face.... At the bottom end of the scale some animals are abominable, not to be touched or eaten. Others are fit for the table, but not for the altar.²¹

This is extended to other rules against mixtures. What one is willing to eat signals whom one is willing to marry. Food thus sends strong signals about social relations. Since most marriages in Greco-Roman society tended to be endogamous, between close-knit families from the same social strata,²² eating with someone meant that one was willing to accept that person as “family.”

Likewise, a group’s acceptance of culturally dominant meal patterns signaled that it saw itself firmly located within that culture. At the narrower internal level among small social groupings such as associations, epigraphic data from Greco-Roman antiquity suggest that no matter how basic the

fare, a strong sense of conviviality was created that allowed the members to bond with one another.²³ For example, members could rely on one another for support in times of crisis; “if a members should be wronged, they and all the friends shall come to his assistance, so that everyone might know that we show piety to the gods and to our friends” (*IG II² 1275 = AGRW 13*; Piraeus, late-third or second century BCE).

During the Roman period, meals functioned as a form of community building where boundaries were established and maintained.

The emperor could have his banquets and the social recognition associated with them, but so too on a much more modest scale could the poor workman. It was a convenient and effective way to confirm one’s place, especially since food, by its very nature as a critical commodity in pre-industrial society, could be manipulated to underscore more effectively than any other substance the social difference between one person and the next.²⁴

The assertion of group boundaries through eating and drinking with one another is a form of “segregative commensality.”²⁵ Clear directives are in place to demarcate “insiders” and “outsiders,” and at times of commensality the group becomes visible to itself through those who can attend (generally members and recruits) and those who are excluded (nonmembers and defectors).

The Greco-Roman associations reflect the predilection for segregative commensality.²⁶ For example, the by-laws of an association in Lanuvium, Italy, records regulations governing times and procedures for banquets that are limited in attendance to members only (*CIL XIV 2112 = AGRW 310, 136 CE*). The restriction to 60 members in the private association of Aesclepius and Hygia on the Campus Martius in Rome (*CIL VI 10234 = AGRW 322, 153 CE*), which had dedicated building space for banquets, emphasizes the “set apartness” of this association’s members and their meal times. Other examples of segregative commensality include the well-known and oft-discussed inscription of the Iobacchoi (*IG II² 1369 = AGRW 8*; Athens, c. 178 CE), the association of Zeus Hypsistos in Philadelphia, Egypt (*PLond VII 2193 = AGRW 295, 69–58 BCE*), and an association dedicated to the god Men Tyrannos (*IG II² 1366 = AGRW 22*; Sounion, second to third century CE).²⁷ In each case it is clear that group meals aimed at providing an occasion for building and affirming group solidarity, although the regulations around proper behavior and decorum at meals do suggest that this ideal was not always met.²⁸ In contexts of segregative commensality, group members often “let down their guard.”²⁹ Nevertheless, the regulations

restricting such disruptive behavior reflect a group ideal that makes meetings the locus of belonging and acceptance.

The important social role of association meals can be seen by examining evidence from association meeting places, with the *caveat* that it is difficult to generalize concerning the physical setting of association meals as we do not have specific locations that accompany our inscriptional evidence that they had meals.³⁰ In many cases, particularly with funerary banquets, the meal would have been held in the open air using movable equipment or in rented spaces such as *taberna*.³¹ At the same time, there is no standard architectural form to which association buildings conform, and thus the identification of buildings as belonging to an association must be based on inscriptions or on contents.³² Such buildings do not always have specific dining areas; in many cases space was generally multipurpose, and at meal-times “couches could be set out in the main hall, side rooms, the porticoes, or the court itself.”³³

There are, however, some association halls that have clear evidence of banqueting facilities.³⁴ In Pergamon, for example, there are the remains of the meeting place of an association of Dionysiac *Bukoloi* (“cowherds”) in use from the second to fourth century CE (AGRW B6). The hall is divided in half by a cult-niche on the northeast wall and the doorway on the northwest. Permanent stone *triclinia* about one meter high and two meters wide are set along each wall. Together these *triclinia* could accommodate about 70 participants, who would recline with their head oriented toward the middle of the hall. A marble shelf sits slightly below the podium and most likely served as the place for food and drink to be set down. Access to the podium was gained via small sets of steps set against the podium base. Small, irregularly placed openings below the podium probably served for the storage of cultic or dining items. Bones found below the cement floor indicate that a large quantity of meat—beef, ham, and poultry—was consumed.³⁵ It is difficult to imagine any purpose for the association’s use of this hall other than banqueting, indicating a central aspect of their communal practice.

In what appears to be a building belonging to a wealthy association of traders and financial dealers in Pompeii (regio I = AGRW B23; mid-first century CE) there remains five separate rooms each containing a marble faced *triclinium* and decorated with elaborate wall paintings of mythological scenes and Dionysiac figures, along with a system for water effects (the latter being an example of “conspicuous luxury”). In total, the building could accommodate up to 100 diners. As Dunbabin points out, “whatever their other activities, dining must have played a central role if they needed a special building for this purpose.”³⁶

In Ostia there exists a large building that housed the wealthy association of carpenters (*fabri tignuarii*) that contains four dining rooms in its east wing (building I.xii.1 = AGRW B14; second to fourth century CE). Each room could accommodate up to a dozen diners, indicating that 40 to 50 participants were expected on a regular basis.³⁷ The proximity of this and other association clubhouses to the main forum in Ostia suggests “these types of clubs had some connection with the political leaders of the city.”³⁸ This may be too generalized a conclusion to draw, however, as other professional associations in Ostia had shops that probably included their meeting place adjacent to a different, much smaller, forum located near the port (the “Forum of the Corporations”).³⁹ The proximity to one or other fora is most likely explained as a desire of a trade-based association to be located near the primary hub of related commercial activity. Although this would give them a public face and may indicate an interest in political activity, this activity would be restricted to honoring the elite, as we will note below.

Drawing on archeological and epigraphic information for meeting locations of associations in Roman Imperial Italy, Bollmann provides a taxonomy of the building remains there along three categories: (1) those with an axial entrance, portico court, and cult place, (2) temple structures, and (3) halls and *tabernae*.⁴⁰ The third type, halls and *tabernae*, is the most common form of association building remains. When Bollmann examines the civic context of the *collegia* in Rome and Ostia she finds that the most important consideration for locating a meeting place was its proximity to the center of the city, leading her to conclude that the *collegia* were more concerned with social than religious functions. Although Slater rightly calls this distinction “anachronistic,”⁴¹ it should not detract from the overall conclusion that the predominant physical space that can be identified as having been used and/or owned by associations reflects a clear emphasis on socialization, with banquet space often bearing positions of prominence in the buildings.

The problem of the limited evidence for the banqueting halls pales in comparison to the lack of evidence for the form that the association banquets took. “Since *collegia* seldom put up inscriptions in commemoration of such routine celebrations and none of the collegial bylaws of the *collegia centonariorum* have survived, we do not know the details of these regular convivial events.”⁴² This observation could be extended to include all types of associations. Nevertheless, there exists an interesting inscription from the British Museum dedicated to Zeus Hypsistos that depicts an association banquet (AGRW 110 [and fig. 9]; from Panormos, near Kyzikos in Asia Minor).⁴³ Underneath a relief of three gods (Zeus, Artemis, and Apollo) there is a shallow relief depicting the members of an association holding a banquet. The participants are reclining on their left arms before a shallow table while

watching a female dancing to a flautist and percussionist. To the right of the scene a man makes preparations over an amphora of wine, probably for the symposium.⁴⁴ All in all, this rare piece of epigraphic evidence suggests that associations held their meals in the manner customary for Greco-Roman banquets, as we shall see below.⁴⁵

Political Characteristics of Association Meals

Lui rightly points out that “[t]he central importance of convivial activities in the collective life of the *collegia* might be demonstrated by the inclusion of (elaborate) rules concerning banquets in the *collegium* bylaws, the presence of dining rooms in the collegial meeting-places (*scholae*), and the attention that convivial activities received from outsiders, especially Christian writers.”⁴⁶ That the demonstration of the importance of meals for associations are manifest in a public or semi-public manner—through inscriptions, through dedicated physical space, and by being noticed by outsiders—suggests that for the mostly nonelite association members much was to be gained, and little to be lost, through the public display of convivial activity within the wider cultural context. Cult, funerary practices, and conviviality are “forms of socialization, and manifestations of both collegial solidarity and a means to negotiate such solidarity. Solidarity, however, does not necessarily mean equality.”⁴⁷ Since these activities took place in public to one degree or another they also functioned “as important occasions for each group’s image-building.”⁴⁸ Below we will explore briefly some key aspects of the public display by focusing on how banquets function to demonstrate group identity to insiders and to outsiders.

Banquets served a variety of purposes for benefactors and participants at the same time. Benefactors increasingly funded banquets in the Roman East, using them as vehicles to recognize, honor, and confirm publicly the hierarchical status of groups within their society. While there does not seem to be a fixed empire-wide social hierarchy as in the West, associations were given a place above the plebeians. Banquets gave the associations opportunities to develop a “festive identity.” The wealthier members of *collegia* were able to adopt “status association” with the civic government and the recognized elite.⁴⁹

In this regard, association meals are a type of “transgressive commensality,” in which there is “a relationship of exchange between parties of a different social or economic status.”⁵⁰ Although recognized, boundaries are transgressed, albeit temporarily and symbolically. Yet, “it is by transgressing them that it contributes to recognizing and maintaining” social distinctions.⁵¹ This type of commensality is evidenced through banquets in which

associations honor their patrons and benefactors. Occasions where the elite are recognized for their benefaction serve to reinforce social differentiation among the elite and the group members. Yet, by honoring elite men and women as patrons, and even as members of an otherwise nonelite group, the association presents a challenge to the *status quo* itself, which eschews such porous boundaries in the Roman *ordo*.

The evidence indicates that various association meals can be classified as segregative or transgressive commensality. These classifications allow us also to note how association meals functioned politically as a means for both assimilation and resistance to dominant cultural mores. The rules and regulations within associations represent an attempt to maintain cohesion and peace (*pax*) during meetings in order to minimize the disruptive behavior that so often caused the associations to come under suspicion of local authorities. The ability to expel errant members represents the strongest sanction available to *collegia* under Roman law.⁵² Thus, there is collusion with imperial authorities through the maintenance of order in the meetings and banquets.

Harland's study of inscriptions from Roman Asia concerning the involvement of associations in imperial dimensions of civic life confirms the complexity of group–society relations, reflecting the groups' acculturation, adaptation, and selection of cultural traditions while still maintaining community identity.⁵³ Associations were positively involved in imperial facets of civic life, sociocultural civic activities, and benefactions, maintaining, for the most part, positive relationships with imperial officials and honoring the imperial cult. At the same time, the transgressive commensality noted above, along with the general suspicion of associations as verging on the cusp of political action that threatened the state, meant there was always a chance that associations of any sort could be censured or dissolved by local authorities or imperial edict. Thus, associations had to play up their ability to assimilate into the wider culture while carefully negotiating those places where they might be perceived to be expressing resistance to the dominance of imperial rule.

During the Augustan and post-Augustan periods, Roman cultural values spread from Rome into Italy and then to the western and eastern parts of the Roman Empire in a process that many scholars refer to as "Romanization."⁵⁴ This process was a complex mixture of "cultural assimilation, hybridization, and resistance."⁵⁵ Many factors such as preexisting cultural elements, local elite practices, and social competition affected both the processes and outcomes. The strong cultural ties between earlier Greek culture and the Roman culture that adopted it made it possible for Augustan values to be accepted and adapted easily in the empire's eastern regions, since the new

values were often couched in the clothing of the traditional values. This “cultural bricolage”⁵⁶ bestowed new functions and meanings on preexisting cultural elements in the context of Roman rule.

One of the key components of Romanization was the development of urban centers, either through postconquest revitalization or the settling of veteran soldiers in “new” colonies. “Armies pacified Rome’s opponents, but cities integrated them into its empire, and urban amenities seduced them into complicity.”⁵⁷ Roman propaganda perpetuated the ideology of the center, while elite Roman men and women set the cultural standards whenever they were abroad. Of particular note is the deployment of the elite men and their families to urban centers in the empire in order to have them spend a term ruling non-Romans as preparation for a return to the political scene in Rome itself. Colonial experience leads to promotion through the ranks. Once resident in the cities, these elite Romans would woo the general population through stages of “good works” (*euergetism*) aimed to placate and pacify the locals—“the building of roads and ports, the widespread distribution of statues and temples, and the spread of urban facilities of aqueducts and baths.”⁵⁸ These public displays not only functioned as billboards for the supremacy of Rome, but they also provided the model to which the general populace could aspire.

This Romanization impacted all aspects of life, including religious life. New choices arose for the inhabitants, particularly as “new cults opened themselves up, adopted Roman forms of organization, so that born Romans could participate in them, relate to other members, and not be put off by completely strange customs and roles. It was this institutional assimilation that made real freedom of choice possible, enabling individuals to concentrate on the symbolic level, on ideas of god and notions of salvation.”⁵⁹ In terms of the impact on commensality, no matter the context, whether “Greek *symposia*, Roman *convivia*, philosophical banquets, sacrificial meals, communal meals of clubs, and Jewish and Christian [*sic*] meals” by the first century all had a common form in which slaves served those who reclined for the meal.⁶⁰ This elite form of dining became the norm for all inhabitants of Romanized urban centers and signaled to the Roman authorities that their former enemies were in compliance. Ironically, reclining at meals was not a particularly Roman invention as they themselves had adopted it from their Greek neighbors. Nevertheless, it marked for the Romans a confirmation that civilized society reined supreme and the *pax Romana* would be maintained.

From the Roman elite perspective, it was necessary for banquets to maintain proper decorum, for the sake of those gathered and for the overall well-being of the city. Athenaeus complains

People who gather for dinner-parties today, especially if they come from fair Alexandria, shout, bawl, and objurgate the wine-pourer, the waiter, and the chef; the slaves are in tears, being buffeted by knuckles right and left. To say nothing of the guests, who thus dine in complete embarrassment; if the occasion happen to be a religious festival, even the god will cover his face and depart, abandoning not only the house but also the entire city.⁶¹

This elite expectation for proper decorum at meals seems also to be an expectation within association meals. For many associations, raucous behavior was prohibited by explicit regulations forbidding physical and verbal exchanges, including name-calling, which could detract from the honor of other guests or the flow of the celebration itself. For example, one association warns that a member will be fined if, while taking his seat at a banquet, he shoves in front of another member (*PMich* V 243 = *AGRW* 300; Tebtynis, 14–37 CE). In the Lanuvium association, members who use any abusive or insolent language toward the leaders during a banquet are fined (*CIL* XIV 2112 = *AGRW* 310, 136 CE).

That such regulations were necessary, and appear in more than one association inscription, indicates that the type of behavior about which Athenaeus complains among the elite occurred within the nonelite association banquets. Despite such regulations, however, associations were still repudiated for their indulgence in food and drink. For example, Philo of Alexandria claims of the associations that “you could find no sound elements but only liquor, tippling, drunkenness and the outrageous conduct they lead to” (*Flacc.* 136 = *AGRW* L10). When he compares the Greco-Roman associations with the *Therapeutae* of Alexandria, he deplores the former for behavior leading to idolatry and apostasy, rather than “the joys and sweet comforts of the intellect.”⁶²

Despite this reputation, associations in the Roman Empire had an overall stabilizing effect. For example, they organized public gatherings within accepted political rhetoric as well as ceremonies for the emperor.⁶³ Cities likewise benefited from the existence of associations. They offered many advantages to the urban community such as financial support for public projects and members’ knowledge of building techniques. On the individual level, associations played an important role in everyday life. By way of example, Kolb argues that three rare inscriptions describe cooperation between representatives of three associations (probably all unionizations of workers on imperial estates) and the imperial administration.⁶⁴ All three inscriptions report similar (successful) requests: associations, represented by a chosen member, ask the imperial administration for a plot on the emperor’s

private territory for the construction of a cult site/building. The inscriptions emphasize the imperial power with its links to the “ordinary people,” which is meant to symbolize the association’s prestige. For ordinary people, becoming a member of a professional or religious association was an opportunity for taking part in public life as well as benefiting from the social prestige of the associations that was established in a public, ostentatious way through the contact between representatives of associations and the ruling power represented by members of the imperial administration.⁶⁵

Conclusion

Meal practices provide only a snapshot of association activity. Nevertheless, the conviviality of the association gives us a picture of how members negotiated key social relationships, both internal and external, through which they integrated into the social fabric of society. Although members were not drawn from the elite, their banqueting practices and the social actions reflected therein allowed the association as a whole, and its individual members, to maintain a sense of belonging, both together and within the wider social contexts of which they were a part. Group boundaries were defined and maintained for insiders while the relationship with outsiders was carefully negotiated through the public display of connections with the civic elite. This gave associations a public presence even while they carefully negotiated a role that would support rather than disrupt the political stability of the rulers. Despite some official opposition to the very existence of associations, during the Roman period associations continued to flourish and in so doing held banquets modeled on the dominant cultural practices. Through these banquets they negotiated their presence in the sociopolitical fabric of the empire.

Notes

1. Rüpke, *Religion of the Romans*, 143.
2. For a brief description of associations see Kloppenborg and Ascough, *Greco-Roman Associations*, 1–13. For a translation of association texts, including inscriptions, papyri, and literary texts, see the entries in Ascough, Harland, and Kloppenborg, *Associations in the Greco-Roman World* (abbreviated here as *AGRW*).
3. MacMullen suggests a figure of one-quarter to one-third for Rome in the second century CE, although it is probably similar for other large urban centers at the time. It is perhaps lower during the first century, although still a significant portion of the population (*Enemies of the Roman Order*, 174).

4. Dill, *Roman Society*, 278; Dunbabin, *Roman Banquet*, 85, 94; Donahue, *Roman Community*, 85, also 128–38 and Table 5.7 on pp. 137–138. Rüpke, *Religion of the Romans*, 208; Ascough, “Forms of Commensality,” 33–46; Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations*, 74–85; Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 87–125; Taussig, *In the Beginning*, 91. See further Donahue, *Roman Community*, 126–38. On association meals in general see further Poland, *griechischen Vereinswesens*, 258–267, 392–395; Ausbüttel, *Untersuchungen*, 55–59; Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft*, 21–173.
5. Liu, *Guilds of Textile Dealers*, 248.
6. Bendlin, “Gemeinschaft,” 10.
7. Bendlin, “Gemeinschaft,” 11, citing Waltzing, *Corporations*, I.513.
8. Bendlin, “Gemeinschaft,” 15–18.
9. Leiwo, “Religion, or Other Reasons,” 116.
10. Cf. Liu, *Guilds of Textile Dealers*, 248 and n. 8.
11. Brashaer, *Vereine im griechisch-römischen Ägypten*, 19–22. Such groups often excluded women and children.
12. Brashaer, *Vereine im griechisch-römischen Ägypten*, 24.
13. See also Slater’s critique (“*Scholae*,” 497) of Bollmann’s attempt to mount a similar argument (*Römische Verinshäuser*, 204–212). De Cenival, “Associations dans les Temples,” 5–19 is similarly guilty.
14. Youtie, “*Kline of Sarapis*,” 9–29.
15. Liu, *Guilds of Textile Dealers*, 250, citing *CIL* V 7906 and *CIL* XIV 2112.
16. Grignon, “Commensality and Social Morphology,” 23–33. The following summarizes in part Ascough, “Forms of Commensality,” 33–46.
17. Douglas, *Implicit Meanings*, 231.
18. Grignon, “Commensality and Social Morphology,” 31. Nevertheless, in the Roman banquet, differences among participants were signaled by seating position and size of portion (van Nijf, *Civic World of Professional Associations*, 152–153; Donahue, “Toward a Typology,” 97.
19. Douglas, *Implicit Meanings*, 231. For an exploration of “hidden transcripts” see Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*.
20. Douglas, *Implicit Meanings*, 236.
21. Douglas, *Implicit Meanings*, 249.
22. Rowlandson and Bagnall, *Women and Society*, 85.
23. Dunbabin, *Roman Banquet*, 99.
24. Donahue, *Roman Community*, 89.
25. Grignon, “Commensality and Social Morphology”; Donahue “Toward a Typology.”
26. Donahue, “Toward a Typology,” 105; cf. Garnsey and Saller, *Roman Empire*, 107–125.
27. See Ascough, “Forms of Commensality,” 33–46. The meal practices of the Iobacchoi association are discussed in detail by Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 111–123.

28. Donahue, "Toward a Typology," 106.
29. Grignon, "Commensality and Social Morphology," 29.
30. Smith points out that while there is no standardization as to where an association's meeting place might be found, that location can be linked to the aim or identity of the association (*From Symposium to Eucharist*, 104–105).
31. Dunbabin, *Roman Banquet*, 92–93.
32. There is no common terminology and associations varied in size and function and many owned more than one building (Bollmann, *Römische Verinshäuser*, 47). In general, an association's building was called an *aedes* or *schola* in the West and an *oikos*, *station*, or *ergon* in the East (van Nijf, *Civic World of Professional Associations*, 107; cf. Waltzing, *Corporations*, 4.437–443 for a survey of the western terminology).
33. Dunbabin, *Roman Banquet*, 94. For example, in Theadelphia an association of weavers received a dining room (*deipneterion*) from a benefactor (*IFayum* 2 122, time of Trajan). Presumably, before having received this benefaction they were in the habit of holding banquets, most likely in houses or temporary facilities.
34. I highlight a few examples; more thorough analyses are offered by Bollmann, *Römische Verinshäuser*, and various essays in Egelhaaf-Gaiser and Schäfer, eds., *Religiöse Vereine in der römischen Antike*. See also various association building descriptions in *AGRW* B1 – B28.
35. Radt, *Pergamon*, 197.
36. Dunbabin, *Roman Banquet*, 97.
37. More diners could be accommodated if temporary structures were set up in the central portico; so Dunbabin, *Roman Banquet*, 97–98. Smith sets the number lower at 36 but also notes that more could be accommodated (*From Symposium to Eucharist*, 104).
38. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 104.
39. Dunbabin notes that, unlike the wealthy associations described above, many associations were small and poor and would have met in simple structures in which diners sat to dine, a clear mark of low status (*Roman Banquet*, 99; cf. 79–82). Her argument, however, is not supported by any specific examples.
40. Bollmann, *Römische Verinshäuser*.
41. Slater, "Scholae of Roman collegia," 497.
42. Liu, *Guilds of Textile Dealers*, 249.
43. A similar relief can be seen on *AGRW* 95 (Apamea Myrleia area, Bithynia, 119 or 104 CE).
44. The typical banquet format seems to be assumed; the first part, the meal (*deipnon*) is to be followed by the *symposium*, the drinking part (Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 9; Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft*, 1–2).
45. Cf. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 5; Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft*, 1.
46. Liu, *Guilds of Textile Dealers*, 248.
47. Liu, *Guilds of Textile Dealers*, 276.
48. Liu, *Guilds of Textile Dealers*, 276.

49. See van Nijf, *Civic World of the Professional Associations*, 171, 168, 187.
50. Donahue, "Toward a Typology," 106.
51. Grignon, "Commensality and Social Morphology," 31.
52. Rüpke, *Religion of the Romans*, 211.
53. Harland, "Honouring the Emperor," 99–121; cf. Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations*, 177–264.
54. The following is adapted from Ascough, *Lydia*, 55–57.
55. Champion, *Roman Imperialism*, 214.
56. Roth, *Styling Romanisation*, 39.
57. Crossan and Reed, *In Search of Paul*, 184.
58. Crossan and Reed, *In Search of Paul*, 187–190.
59. Rüpke, *Religion of the Romans*, 214.
60. Balch, "Paul, Families, and Households," 273; cf. also the observation that Judean meal practices imitate Hellenistic practices, which mean they too are "Romanized"; see Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 14–18.
61. *Deipnosophistae* 420, II–III CE, LCL. Marcus Varro (116–127 BCE) complains about the numerous banquets, which he links directly to the rise in food prices (*On Agriculture* 3.2.16).
62. Seland, "Philo and the Clubs," 125; also Philo, *Legat.* 10.311–12 (= *AGRW* L37); *Flacc.* 4 (= *AGRW* L36); see further Seland, "Philo and the Clubs," 110–127; Ascough, *Paul's Macedonian Associations*, 85–87.
63. The political significance of associations is emphasized by Claus, "Integrationsleistung der römischen Vereinigungen," 35–38.
64. Kolb, "Vereine," 201–212. The inscriptions are *CIL* VI 30983 (Monte Testaccio, Rome, middle or end of the second century CE); *CIL* XIV 4570 (marble table from Ostia, 205 CE); and a fragmentary Roman inscription from 168 CE, today stored in the convent of San Paolo *fuori le mura*.
65. For Egypt see San Nicolò, "Vereinsgerichtsbarkeit im hellenistischen Ägypten," 255–300; also San Nicolò, *Ägyptisches Vereinswesen*, 2.16–22.

CHAPTER 5

Banqueting Values in the Associations: Rhetoric and Reality

Philip A. Harland

When it comes to assessing what was acceptable conduct at banquets in the Greco-Roman world, the *ideal* elite perspective seems to have emphasized the need for equal treatment, friendly relations, and pleasant interactions among guests.¹ Yet, as Michael Peachin, Willi Braun, and others point out, in reality, there was some leeway or deliberate play on such convivial conventions that ultimately allowed for what we might call mildly transgressive behavior (in the eyes of the participants) in relation to the ideal.² Thus, it may have been a common feature at some commensal gatherings for persons to engage in verbal, jocular, or other forms of abuse in relation to the guests for entertainment and other purposes. Suetonius, for instance, relates how Claudius often dozed off at banquets and (before he was princeps, at least) would be rudely awoken by being pelted by olives. On one occasion, other guests put shoes on Claudius's hands so that when he awoke from a nap he would be rubbing his eyes with his feet, so to speak (Suetonius, *Claud.* 8). In a similar vein, several regulations of associations suggest a concern among such groups to set limits on appropriate relations within the banqueting context and to establish rules to prevent jocular or other activities escalating to the point of brawls.

On the other hand, several ostensibly historical or openly fictional accounts present a picture of what one might call wildly transgressive behavior, culturally speaking, within associations. A number of these accounts of activities

within associations focus on extreme banqueting behaviors involving human sacrifice, cannibalism, and sexual activities, among other things. These accounts are found both within openly fictional novels and within ostensibly historical narratives. As I argue elsewhere, such stories of wild transgression in both fictional and historical narratives draw on ethnographic stereotypes of the “other” in order to present a frightening picture of the dangerous or alien antiassociation.³ Most importantly for us here, these stories reflect common banqueting values through inversion.

In this paper, I would like to build on my previous study in order to underline that this inversion depends on common knowledge of the far more tame convivial and ritual aims of real-life associations as attested in epigraphy. An analysis of the regulations of associations that have survived clarifies how concerns for order often prevailed despite signs of mildly transgressive behavior at banquets. Self-regulation was an important component affecting activities at the meetings and banquets of associations. Both imagined antiassociations and real-life guilds provide important glimpses into widely held banqueting values in the context of early Christianity.

Inversion of Banqueting Values: Wildly Transgressive Banquets

Before turning to epigraphic evidence for actual banqueting values within associations, it is important to sketch out some of my previous findings concerning wild transgression in banqueting contexts. Basically there are two main contexts in which we encounter stories of wild transgression within banqueting settings of associations, and in both cases there is more rhetoric than reality involved.

Openly Fictional Accounts in Novels

On the one hand, there are numerous openly fictional accounts within novels that present an association of bandits (*latrones* in Latin/*lēstai* in Greek) or low-lives at meal.⁴ In essence, the villainous group is often presented as the antitype of what an association should be, as well as an inversion of all that is pious and right in banqueting and other settings. Thus, for instance, Apuleius presents a story of a “guild” (*collegium*) of brigands devoted to Mars who captured Lucius, the ass, and Charite, an upper-class “maiden of refined qualities.”⁵ The overall behavior of the association at meals is summarized thus: “They ate and drank in utter disorder, swallowing meat by the heap, bread by the stack, and cups by the legion. They played raucously, sang deafeningly, and joked abusively, and in every other respect behaved just like those half-beasts, the Lapiths and Centaurs.”⁶ Here we are witnessing

an inversion of common banqueting values. The brigands are characterized as excessive and un-human in their banqueting manners, as indicated by the comparison with the banquets of the Lapiths and Centaurs, mythical figures most remembered in connection with a violent wedding banquet.⁷ What comes to the fore in other accounts of culturally transgressive brigand meals is only hinted at in Apuleius' story in connection with their new brigand-chief from Thrace (actually the disguised bridegroom of Charite come to rescue) who was "nursed on human blood."⁸

Particularly common in portraits of the anti-banquets of brigands and other groups is the more wildly transgressive practice of human sacrifice accompanied by a cannibalistic meal, the ultimate parody of the sacrificial banquet. Although fragmentary, Lollianos's *Phoenician Story* provides a representative example in his tale of a group of criminal types, who are also initiates in some form of distorted mysteries.⁹ The episode begins with the sacrifice of the child or servant, a sacrificial oath ritual, and a sacrificial meal, and runs as follows:

Meanwhile another man, who was naked, walked by, wearing a crimson loincloth, and throwing the body of the *pais* (child or servant) on its back, he cut it up, and tore out its heart and placed it upon the fire. Then, he took up [the cooked heart] and sliced it up to the middle. And on the surface [of the slices] he sprinkled [barley groats] and wet it with oil; and when he had sufficiently prepared them, [he gave them to the] initiates, and those who held (a slice?) [he ordered] to swear in the blood of the heart that they would neither give up nor betray [— — —], not [even if they are led off to prison], nor yet if they be tortured (*PColon* 3328, B 1 Recto, lines 9–16).¹⁰

This whole sacrificial scene follows the usual Greek pattern of sacrifice, including the central importance of the internal organs (*splagchna*), as well as an accompanying oath ceremony, in which portions of the innards were consumed together as a symbolic means of binding participants.¹¹ What is very unusual, and deliberately inverts what would otherwise be considered pious activity among initiates in honor of the gods is the fact that it is a human, rather than animal, victim in this ritual. Lollianos was not alone in combining both human sacrifice and oath-taking in an inversion of common ritual, as the ostensibly historical accounts of the conspiracy of Catiline clearly show (in connection with his political opposition to Cicero in the 60s BCE).¹² Other novels likewise relate tales of an association of brigands engaging in inappropriate banqueting practices that involve the slaughter of a human being in the context of a sacrificial banquet, including Xenophon's

Ephesian Tale (2.13) and Achilles Tatius's *Leucippe and Clitophon* (3.9–22), both from the second century.

Accusations against Other Peoples in Ostensibly Historical Accounts

These inversions of banqueting values attributed to associations of low-lives in openly fictional accounts apparently came to influence authors who claimed to be describing actual historical events, particularly when the subjects of the account were considered foreigners or barbarians (cf. Winkler 1980:178).¹³ Dio Cassius's accounts of two different revolts, by the "cowherds" (*boukoloi*) of the Egyptian delta (ca. 172–73 CE) and by Judeans (Jews) in Cyrene, demonstrate this blurring of the line between fact and fiction. He claims that the cowherds "sacrificed [a Roman centurion's] companion, and after swearing an oath over his entrails, they devoured them" (*Roman History* 72.4.1–2 [trans. LCL]). Similarly, the Judeans in Cyrene "would eat the flesh of their victims, make belts for themselves of their entrails, anoint themselves with their blood and wear their skins for clothing" (*Roman History* 68.32.1–2). For Dio, this was not out of the ordinary for such foreign peoples; he suggests that the Judean immigrants in Egypt and on Cyprus had "perpetrated many similar outrages" (68.32.2).

This tendency to attribute inverted banqueting values to foreigners or cultural minorities, including human sacrifice and the cannibalistic accompanying meal, is attested in several other ostensibly historical accounts. Thus, when Livy relates the story of the Bacchanalia in Rome (ca. 186 BCE), he presents this case as a story of a foreign (Greek) cultic association threatening the Roman way of life and contributing to moral decline (Livy, *History of Rome* 39.8–19). Livy's account explains that a "Greek of humble origin" introduced secretive gatherings in honor of Dionysos:

From the time when the rites were held promiscuously, with men and women mixed together, and when the license offered by darkness had been added, no sort of crime, no kind of immorality, was left unattempted. There were more obscenities practiced between men than between men and women. Anyone refusing to submit to outrage or reluctant to commit crimes was slaughtered as a sacrificial victim. To regard nothing as forbidden was among these people the summit of religious achievement (*History of Rome* 39.13).¹⁴

Here we are seeing the common stereotypes so familiar to us now of wild banquets combined with human sacrifice. Yet added to this is the accusation of sexual "perversions" that accompanied the drinking. Ethnographic

descriptions in which foreign peoples are accused of unusual sexual practices are common, as in Tacitus' account of the Judeans' supposed "unlawful" sexual behavior (*Hist.* 5.5.2; cf. Martial, *Epigrams* 7.30).

It is important to mention some of the precedents in accusations against Judeans before moving on to allegations against Jesus followers.¹⁵ In ethnographic descriptions of the customs of the Judeans, both Damocritus and Apion (or Apion's source) give credence to rumors, or simply create stories, that Judeans engaged in human sacrifice (Stern 1974–1984:1.531).¹⁶ There is a sense in which the accusation of human sacrifice and the accompanying meal is a short form for notions of Judeans' supposed hostility to foreigners (*misoxenos bios*), as in Hecataeus (c. 300 BCE), and hatred of human kind (*misanthropia*), as in Apollonios Molon (first century BCE).¹⁷ According to Josephus, Apion, for instance, related the "unutterable law of the Judeans" who annually "would kidnap a Greek foreigner, fatten him up for a year, and then convey him to a wood, where they slew him, sacrificed his body with their customary ritual, partook of his flesh, and, while immolating the Greek, swore an oath of hostility to the Greeks" (Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2.91–96 [trans. LCL]).

It is within this context of the attribution of improper sacrificial and banqueting practices to foreigners or cultural minorities that we can place the repeated accusations of both human sacrifice and cannibalism against groups of Jesus followers.¹⁸ Among the most developed instances of these accusations are those outlined in Minucius Felix's dialogue. There Caecilius critiques the atheistic, Christian "gang... of discredited and proscribed desperadoes" (*Oct.* 8.3).¹⁹ They consist of the dregs of society and women, who are also considered "profane conspirators (*profanae coniurationis*) leagued together by meetings at night and ritual fasts" (8.3–4). The initiation of new members takes place in a sacrificial banquet that once again echoes the antibanquets we have seen in both novels and historical or ethnographic sources:

An infant, cased in dough to deceive the unsuspecting, is placed beside the person to be initiated. The novice is thereupon induced to inflict what seems to be harmless blows upon the dough, and unintentionally the infant is killed by his unsuspecting blows; the blood – oh, horrible – they lap up greedily; the limbs they tear to pieces eagerly; and over the victim they make league and covenant, and by complicity in guilt pledge themselves to mutual silence (9.5–6 [trans. LCL]).

In many respects, then, what we are witnessing with these allegations against Christians is the convergence of several factors: ethnographic

stereotypes of the alien or immigrant cultic association (e.g., Bacchanalia), common allegations against Judean cultural groups specifically, and novelistic or popular stories of the internal threat often associated with criminal or low-life antiassociations.

Similar accusations of disorderly meals are found in Judean or Christian sources when authors are characterizing the banquets of other Greeks and Romans (i.e., “pagans”). Thus, for instance, Philo’s account of the gatherings of the Judean Therapeutists in Egypt draws out a comparison and contrast with the “frenzy and madness” of the Greek, Roman, and Egyptian banquets and drinking parties (*Contempl.* 40–41).²⁰ For Philo, the associations specifically were “founded on no sound principle but on strong liquor, drunkenness, intoxicated violence and their offspring, wantonness” (*Flaccus* 136–37 [trans. adapted from LCL]; cf. *Legat.* 312–13).²¹ Though there may be truth in the fact that drunkenness was a part of the religious and social celebrations of some associations on certain occasions, scholars need to refrain from adopting the moralists’ critique as a sign that the associations were all about partying and could care less about honoring the gods.²²

Self-Regulation and Banqueting Values in Real Associations

Inscriptional and papyrological evidence for the actual banqueting and sacrificial activities of associations comes across as far less exciting, one might even say bland, in relation to the more extreme and imaginative materials we have just been discussing.²³ In particular, although there are indications of mildly transgressive or abusive conduct, and drinking was most certainly a component in such matters, there was simultaneously a widely shared set of values which set parameters on banqueting behavior within associations and which, from time to time, could be set in stone. Moreover, the association regulations or sacred laws that have survived to us are concerned with issues of order and decorum in meetings, rituals, and banquets. There is a consistency of focus on these concerns from one group to the next and from one area of the empire to another. Although rules may often be drawn up to deal with problems that were actually encountered, the regulations suggest that “good order”—as defined by such groups—remained a prevalent value in many banqueting settings.

Regulations dealing with banqueting activities should be understood within the broader context of the concern for both order and success in the convivial and cultic aims of associations. The regulations that have survived supply both (1) positive rules regarding festival gatherings and meals and (2) negative rules concerning potential misconduct in banqueting settings. The latter suggest that although mildly transgressive behavior associated

with drinking or contests for honor likely occurred from time to time, there were clear limits on where the line was to be drawn between having a good time, on the one hand, and disorder, on the other.

“They Shall Hold a Banquet Each Month”

On the positive side, the statutes of associations are often concerned with establishing certain banqueting and sacrificial occasions and ensuring that these were properly attended and properly furnished both in terms of the banqueting itself and in terms of the accompanying rituals in honor of the gods. Dennis Smith discusses this at some length in relation to the synod devoted to Zeus Hysistos at Philadelphia in Egypt (*PLond* 2710 [c. 69–58 BCE]), the *collegium* devoted to Diana and Antionos at Lanuvium in Italy (*CIL* XIV 2112 [136 CE]), and the devotees of Dionysos at Athens (*IG* II² 1368 [176 CE]).²⁴ In these cases, the groups’ statutes clearly outline occasions for banquets and festivals, as well as the role of functionaries or patrons in ensuring supplies were adequate and that rituals and meals were performed properly.

Similarly, all three of the association regulations from Tebtunis in Egypt (mid-first century CE) that have been discovered specify statutes not only outlining when and how gatherings and banquets were to take place, but also requiring the attendance of members. Fines are specified for lack of attendance or failure to perform certain requirements (*PMich* V 243–245).²⁵ The statutes of one association (*plēthos*) specify that there be monthly banquets “on the day of god Augustus” with the superintendent (*epimelētēs*) “furnishing drink for the toasts,” and that there be a one-day feast in the case of the death of a member (no. 244; cf. no. 243). In another rule, there is an emphasis on the need for members to attend monthly banquets and to pay their dues, as well as the stipulation that: “If anyone receives notice of a meeting and does not attend, let him be fined one drachma in the village, but in the city four drachmas” (*PMich* V 243; time of Tiberius). In an association on an estate of Emperor Claudius at Tebtunis, there is a similar concern: “If the president issues a call in the village and anyone does not attend, let him be fined two drachmas in silver for the association.” Furthermore, “If a president or a father or mother or wife or child or brother or sister dies and anyone of the undersigned men does not attend the funeral, let such a one be fined four drachmas for the association” (*PMich* V 244). The guild of salt merchants at Tebtunis similarly specifies that “it is a condition that [the members] shall drink regularly on the twenty-fifth of each month, each one six pints (a *chous*) of beer...” (*PMich* V 245). This concern for the attendance or allegiance of members was also expressed in the group devoted to Zeus

Hypsistos at Philadelphia in Egypt: “All are to obey the president and his servant in matters pertaining to the association, and they shall be present at all commanded occasions that are established for them and at meetings, gatherings, and outings” (*PLond* 2710, line 14).

One of the more recently discovered sacred laws of an association, that of a synod devoted to Herakles (*Heraklistai*) from Paiania in Attica, shows special concern for proper commensal and sacrificial provisions (*SEG* 31 [1981] 122 = *NGSL* 5; 90–110 CE).²⁶ The treasurer of the group was responsible for supplying the sacrificial victim (a boar) for the god once a year (line 37). The rules specify that if those contracted to purchase the supply of pork or wine failed to furnish them, they would have to pay back twice the amount, and those responsible for these duties were to provide sureties (lines 20–22). Further on in the inscription, there is reference to four (other) members who were to be chosen by lot for every feast day, two in charge of meat and two in charge of pastries (lines 31–33). Any underhanded dealings by these members would result in a fine of 20 drachmas. New members, whether adult or child, were to pay a fee in the form of pork for the meal (lines 38–40). When they gathered for their sacrifices and meals, everyone was to “wear a wreath for the god” (line 45).

“It shall not be Permissible ... to bring the Symposia to Nought”

Reference to possible misconduct among the devotees of Herakles brings us to the negative side of regulation. The associations anticipated the sorts of misconduct that could take place at gatherings where drinking was part of the sacrificial banquets, and where personal relations or the pursuit of honor among members could negatively influence conduct and potentially bring the festivities “to nought”. There is, in fact, a consistency from one group to the next in the rules pertaining to potential banquetting misconduct (at least in the few that have survived), such that it seems that there was a commonly held set of values that underlie these concerns about proper conduct in feasting, values that span the Mediterranean from Italy to Greece and Egypt. Thus we find the following in the rules of the devotees of Zeus Hypsistos, which are echoed elsewhere: “It shall not be permissible for any one of [the members]... to make factions or to leave the brotherhood (*phratra*) of the president for another, or for men to enter into one another’s pedigrees at the symposium or to abuse one another at the symposium or to chatter or to indict or accuse another or to resign the course of the year or again to bring the symposia to nought...” (*PLond* 2710).²⁷ One of the associations at Tebtunis likewise outlines similar areas of potential banquetting misconduct, including taking another’s seat at the banquet or shoving and defaming fellow members, and fines are stipulated to prevent these offences (*PMich* V

243).²⁸ If anyone engaged in a fight within the synod of Heraklists in Attica, the instigator was to pay ten drachmas the following day, and the one who engaged with him five. The instigator could also be subject to expulsion from the association on the vote of the members (lines 5–8). At Lanuvium in Italy, increasing levels of fines begin to indicate which offences are considered more serious than others, with abusive treatment against the leadership being particularly serious: “Any member who uses any abusive or insolent language to a president (*quinquennalis*) at a banquet shall be fined 20 *sesterces*” (lines 25–28; trans. Lewis and Reinhold 1966:273–75).

The concern for order and proper roles during rituals and communal meals in the rules of the Bacchic association (Iobacchoi) at Athens contrasts starkly to the wild transgressions that Livy imagines at gatherings of such associations of the god Dionysos. Here the procedure for dealing with such offences internally is clearly laid out, and the seriousness of abusive or violent offences becomes very clear:

It is not lawful for anyone in the gathering to sing, cause disturbances or applaud. Rather members shall speak and do their parts with all good order and quietness, as the priest or the chief-bacchant gives directions (cf. lines 45–50) ... Now if anyone begins a fight, is found disorderly, sits in someone else’s seat or is insulting or abusing someone else, the person abused or insulted shall produce two of the Iobacchoi as sworn witnesses, testifying that they heard the insult or abuse. The one who committed the insult or abuse shall pay to the common fund 25 light drachmae, or the one who was the cause of the fight shall either pay the same 25 drachmae or not come to any more meetings of the Iobacchoi until he pays. If someone comes to blows, let the one who was struck file a report with the priest or the vice-priest, who shall without fail convene a meeting and the Iobacchoi shall judge by a vote as the priest presides. Let the offender be penalized by exclusion for a time – as long as seems appropriate – and by paying a fine up to 25 drachmae. The same penalty shall also be applied to the one who is beaten and does not go to the priest or the chief-bacchant but has instead brought a charge to the public courts. Let the penalty be the same for the officer in charge of good order (*eukosmos*) if he does not expel those who fight (*IG* II² 1368, lines 67–95; trans. mine).²⁹

Further on, the role of this officer is spelled out in more detail:

The officer in charge of good order shall be chosen by lot or be appointed by the priest, bearing the wand (*thyrsos*) of the god for anyone who is

disorderly or creates a disturbance. And if the wand be laid on anyone—and the priest or the chief-bacchant approves—let him leave the feast. And if he refuses, let those who have been appointed by the priests as ‘horses’ take him outside the door and let him be liable to the punishment concerning those who fight (lines 136–146).

It is worth asking to what degree such regulations were respected and followed, thereby ensuring that “good order” (as defined by such groups) usually prevailed at the meetings, sacrifices, and banquets? It is difficult to know for sure, yet several of the monuments that have survived to us emphasize the authority and respect that was given to an association’s statutes, such that it would be hard to imagine members flagrantly breaking these laws on a regular basis. Thus, a household-based association at Philadelphia, Asia Minor (first century BCE), received its sacred regulations directly from Zeus himself (by way of a dream given to the leader of the group), and the regulations were placed under the charge of the “holy guardian,” Agdistis: “May she create good thoughts in men and women, free people and slaves, in order that they may obey the things written here” (*SIG*³ 985, lines 53–55; trans. Barton and Horsley 1981:10).³⁰ On entering into this association, members were to swear an oath that they would follow the rules.³¹ Furthermore, members were to show respect for the regulations at the “monthly and annual sacrifices” by touching the inscribed plaque, which was imagined to have the effect of revealing those who had broken any of its stipulations (lines 55–59). Similarly, at Lanuvium there were warnings to potential new recruits regarding the importance of the regulations (*CIL* lines 17–19).

There were also more down-to-earth means of ensuring that statutes were followed, as we have seen. In several cases, associations devoted considerable attention to outlining the fines that would be paid for violation of specific rules and some, such as the Iobacchoi, went further by empowering specific officers “to prevent any of those decrees from being violated” (lines 28–31). The “democratic” element in some instances also involved members approving the ordinances, which would once again increase the members’ investment of authority (*kyria*) in the rules to which they agreed (*IG* II² 1368, lines 14–24; *PMich* V 243, lines 12–13, 17–34; cf. *PLond* 2710, line 4).

Conclusion

Small social–religious groups or associations, both imagined and real, provide important glimpses into banqueting values. Authors of both fiction and history played on what was commonly expected social and religious behavior within such groups by presenting alien associations or low-life

criminal guilds as the inversion of all that was pious and right. The wild transgressions of ritual murder and the accompanying cannibalistic meal, symbolic of inverting piety and destroying humanity or society itself, stand out as the epitome of the antibanquet. Tales of this sort, informed by ethnographic discourses of the “other,” were frightening precisely because they represented a total distortion of the goals of most associations, namely the intimately related goals of appropriately honoring the gods (through sacrifice) and feasting with friends. Sometimes, both Judean synagogues and Christian congregations fell prey to this technique of defining oneself over against the “other,” primarily because of the foreignness of their nonparticipation in honoring, or sacrificing to, the Greek or Roman gods, because of their monotheism.

Epigraphic evidence concerning real-life associations suggests that mildly transgressive behavior along the lines of the jocular abuse mentioned in the introduction or, sometimes, actually coming to blows in personal disagreements or contests for honor could and did take place. Yet there were commonly shared values of appropriate banqueting behavior that set limits on such conduct, ensuring that the convivial and cultic aims of these groups were generally met. When such values were set in stone as statutes, members who felt themselves abused, offended, or dishonored in some way would have a ready avenue to address their concerns within the group setting.

Notes

1. Cf. Cicero, *Fam.* 9.24.3; Peachin, “Friendship and Abuse”; Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft*, 4–7.
2. Peachin, “Friendship and Abuse”; Braun, “Typology,” 14–15; cf. Murray, “Affair,” 157.
3. Harland, *Dynamics of Identity*.
4. On brigands in fiction, see, most recently, Henrichs, “Pagan Ritual;” Winkler, “Lollianos;” Jones, “Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*;” Bertrand, “Le Boucôloi;” Hopwood “All that May Become a Man;” Trinquier, “Le motif du repaire des brigands;” and Watanabe, “Hippochoos.” As to actual associations (*collegia*) of brigands or pirates in literature (beyond the novels), it is difficult to know when we are witnessing real bandits formed into guilds as opposed to labels attached to opponent groups (sometimes actual *collegia* of the normal type). For it was not uncommon for certain politicians or historians to label as “brigands” (*latrones, lēstai*) specific associations (*collegia*) in an effort to undermine groups that supported one’s opponents (cf. Cicero, *Pis.* 8–9; *Sest.* 33–34, 55; Suetonius, *Aug.* 32.1–2; Appian, *Hist. rom.* 5.132; cf. Strabo, *Geogr.* 12.570; 17.792, 802; Josephus, *B.J.*, throughout). On banditry and on its use as a metaphor for the “de-stated” or “barbaric” non-person, see Shaw, “Bandits.”

5. *Metam.*, 3.28–4.25; 6.25–7.12; cf. Pseudo-Lucian, *The Ass*, 21–26
6. *Metam.*, 4.8 [trans. LCL].
7. Cf. Homer, *Od.* 21.285–304; Lucian, *Symposium, or The Lapiths*; Pausanias, *Descr.* 1.17.2, 1.28.2, 5.10.8
8. *Metam.*, 7.5; cf. Herodotus, *Hist.* 4.64.
9. *POxy* 1368 and *PColon* 3328 (here the focus is on the narrative in B1 recto), on which see Henrichs, *Die Phoinikika*. Cf. Henrichs, “Pagan Ritual;” Winkler, “Lollianos;” Jones, “Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*,” Grant, “Charges of ‘Immorality’;” Henrichs, “Human Sacrifice,” 224–232; Sandy in Reardon, *Collected Ancient Greek Novels*, 809–812; Stephens and Winkler, *Ancient Greek Novels*, 314–357 (with Greek text and extensive commentary).
10. Trans. Stephens and Winkler, *Ancient Greek Novels*, 338–341.
11. Henrichs, “Pagan Ritual,” 33–34.
12. These tales developed over the years: Sallust mentions Catiline and his co-conspirator’s oath that was sealed by partaking from “bowls of human blood mixed with wine” (*Bell. Cat.* 22.1–2 [trans. LCL]); Plutarch claims that “they sacrificed a human being and partook of the flesh” (*Cic.* 10.4); and Dio Cassius asserts that the conspirators “sacrificed a *pais*, and after administering the oath over his vitals (*splagchnōn*), ate these in company with the others” (*Roman History* 37.30.3). Cf. Diodorus Siculus, 22.3.5; Plutarch, *Publ.* 4.1; Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* 7.11, 20, 33).
13. Cf. Winkler, “Lollianos,” 178.
14. Trans. Bettenson, *Livy*.
15. On accusations against Jews involving human sacrifice and cannibalism, see Feldman, *Jew and Gentile*, 123–176, and Schäfer, *Judeophobia*.
16. Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors*, 1.531.
17. cf. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile*, 125–48; Schäfer, *Judeophobia*, 15–17, 21–22, 170–79.
18. See further: Harland, *Dynamics of Identity*. For other examples, see Pliny the Younger, *Ep.* 10.96.7; Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44.2; Justin Martyr, *1 Apol.* 26.7; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.1.3–5.2.8; Tertullian, *Apol.* 8.2.
19. Caecilius’ opinions may draw on an earlier source by Marcus Cornelius Fronto (c. 100–166 CE; cf. *Oct.* 9.6).
20. Cf. Seland, “Philo and the Clubs and Associations of Alexandria.”
21. Compare Tertullian’s defence of the Christian association (*factio, corpus*) against accusations such as those mentioned earlier, which includes his retort that financial contributions made by members of Christian associations are “not spent upon banquets nor drinking-parties nor thankless eating-houses,” but on helping the poor and facilitating burial of the dead (*Apol.* 39.5–6 and 38–39 [trans. LCL]).
22. M. P. Nilsson, *Dionysiac Mysteries*, is among those who tend to adopt the moralistic critique in downplaying religious dimensions of associations. See Harland, *Associations*, 55–87; Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*.
23. Epigraphic abbreviations here follow the suggested new standard outlined by Horsley and Lee, “A Preliminary Checklist.” Papyrological abbreviations follow

Oates, Bagnall, Willis, and Worp, *Checklist of Editions*; also available in an updated version online at: <<http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/papyrus/texts/clist.html>>.

24. *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 97–131.
25. See also Boak, “An Ordinance of the Salt Merchants.”
26. See also Raubitschek, “A New Attic Club.”
27. Trans. by Roberts, Skeat, and Nock, “The Gild of Zeus Hypsistos,” 42, with adaptations
28. Cf. Plutarch, *Sept. sap. conv.* 148F–149B; Lucian, *Symp.*, 9; Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft*, 6, 15 n.28.
29. The hymn-singers at Pergamon, who celebrated mysteries in honor of god Augustus, also had an officer in charge of good order (*eukosmos*; *IPerg* 374 B, line 13).
30. Trans. Barton and Horsley, “A Hellenistic Cult Group,” 10.
31. The restorations of *[poreu]|omenoi* and *[orkous]|thōsan* in lines 14–15 and 16–17 seem very plausible, as noted by Barton and Horsley, “A Hellenistic Cult Group,” 18.

CHAPTER 6

Women in Early Christian Meal Gatherings: Discourse and Reality

Angela Standhartinger

There is scarcely any dispute that women participated in early Christian meal gatherings. An example is supplied by the church in Corinth, which we know had women members (1 Cor 1:12; 11:2–16). The meal, followed by a symposium, played a central role in the gatherings of that community (1 Cor 10–14). This inclusive meal praxis was no invention of Christians, as Kathleen Corley, Matthias Klinghardt, and Dennis Smith agree.¹ This praxis corresponds to prevalent practice of Roman times. And yet, as researchers emphasize, even though such “praxis of Christians would not have been unique ... it would have been noticed.”² In her work, Corley shows that the participation of women in symposia and convivia was increasingly challenged in early Roman imperial days. “Many Greco-Roman writers slander those women overstepping ideal womanly roles by accusing them of sexual misconduct or unchastity ... Therefore, women dining or reclining with those outside of their immediate family would still elicit a degree of social criticism even during the Roman period.”³ According to Corley, the gospels reflect the egalitarian meal praxis of Jesus when they record the slander evoked by his sharing meals with tax collectors and sinners. Among those “sinners” were said to be women who were called “prostitutes” (πόρναι) on account of their participation in symposia (cf. Matt 21:31–32).⁴ The existence of Jesus’ inclusive meal praxis notwithstanding—it can still be discerned elsewhere—Corley asserts that only Matthew actually depicts an

inclusive meal gathering. “[O]nly in Matthew are women allowed a place at the table. Women and children [only here] join the men for the miraculous feedings, which Matthew characterizes as Eucharistic feasts enjoyed by the Matthean church.”⁵

On this position, Corley elaborates the discrepancy between the historical meal praxis of women in the Jesus movement and its representation in the New Testament. In addition, she calls attention to the discourse on the several forms of women’s meal praxis in Greek and Roman literature of imperial Rome during the first two centuries. The difficulty of every historical reconstruction of those forms in antiquity results from a fundamental dearth of sources. What we have are primarily texts written by men who introduce the subject of “women at the symposium” either within moral–philosophical reflections on “correct” and “incorrect” forms of meal praxis or else in the context of describing what constitutes ideal or corrupt symposia. Thus, those texts in no way reflect the actual meal praxis of women; rather, they are discursive texts about women. As such, these texts must not be confused with a historical representation of women’s praxis, neither of the women from the upper social strata who are mentioned there nor of the women from other strata who are mentioned only marginally. Therefore, the first thing to observe at the surface of these ancient sources is an ideological discourse. New research into the construction of gender in ancient texts emphasizes that they “use women figuratively to make a point about something else.”⁶ When descriptions of ancient symposia refer to women among the participants, reclining at table and drinking wine, such depictions serve chiefly to characterize the symposium and its male participants. The occasional reference to “women’s demeanor at meals” essentially characterizes or criticizes men.⁷ That raises the question whether ancient literature on the symposia can serve at all as a source for the meal praxis of women in antiquity, and if so, then how.

More recent feminist reflection increasingly looks for ways of discerning women’s praxis in their real existence apart from or in contrast to the given sources. Even though (almost) all literary sources of antiquity were written by men and the women they mention serve primarily rhetorical discussion strategies, several texts nonetheless presuppose the presence of women. There are traces of women to be discerned behind those texts that create gaps and breaks within the textual construction of the world and of the genders. Historian of antiquity Barbara Gold formulates it as follows:

In certain authors . . . we can see a ‘space’ in the fabric, where there is an uneasiness in the representation of gender for both the author and the reader, where the language seems to have more potentiality to be

interpreted from many different perspectives, where the marginalised characters seem to be trying to 'speak,' and where there are border challenges (voices speaking against the text) . . . all these . . . could be seen as places where the mute are pushing through the fabric of the text.⁸

My thesis is that in ancient discussions about women's meal praxis there are such "spaces . . . where the mute are pushing through the fabric of the text." In what follows, I want to refer specifically to one such gap in the discussion of meal gatherings in antiquity. First, I address examples from Greek and Roman literature on the symposium related to that praxis of women in order to call attention to some of the rhetorical strategies they employ. What is not discussed there is of great significance. Second, using Jewish tradition, I shall elucidate the noticeable absence of the meal praxis of women in the symposium literature. What I want to show is that attention to women leads away from the culture of meals among friends, philosophers, and clients portrayed prevalently in that literature and toward contexts in which meals are part of religions and familial gatherings. Third, I shall ask which of those symposium cultures are at issue in Mark and Luke and whether women are represented in their meal praxis, and if so, then how. Finally, I shall venture a hypothesis on the origins of early Christian meal praxis.

Women at Greco-Roman Symposia: Discourse and Reality

Most modern representations of ancient women's meal praxis in New Testament times begin with a quotation by Cornelius Nepos, a first-century BCE writer.

Many actions are seemly according to our code which the Greeks look upon as shameful. For instance, what Roman would blush to take his wife to a dinner party? What matron does not frequent the front rooms of her dwelling and show herself in public? But it is very different in Greece; for there a woman is not admitted to a dinner party unless relatives only are present, and she keeps to the more retired part of the house called 'the women's apartment,' to which no man has access who is not near of kin.⁹

Cornelius Nepos writes this in the context of comparing Roman and Greek culture, something favored by writers of the Roman epoch. But the objectivity of his allegations concerning the meal habits of Greek women is certainly open to question. Nepos himself writes a few lines earlier "And there is no widow in Sparta so noble that she would take part in every banquet

for money.”¹⁰ Joan Burton has shown that Nepos’ thesis, which is repeatedly cited even today, is invalid already for the seventh- to fourth-century BCE Greece. That women were present with men at symposia can be shown already in Homer and Meander, in Isaeus and Theocritus, and others.¹¹ Religious festivals play the most important role next to symposia in the circle of family and with guests.

Religious festivals provided important occasions for women to share food and drink with one another in the ancient Greek world, as elsewhere. This included not only publicly sponsored women’s festivals such as Athen’s Thesmophoria, which featured a major women’s feast, but also countercultural women’s festivals such as the Adonia, traditionally celebrated through private parties. . . . Further, our evidence also shows women holding private sacrifices and including men in the meals afterward. Finally, certain religious celebrations that included both men and women seem to have provided opportunities for men and women to share meals on fairly equal terms.¹²

Roman women, too, participate in symposia in the company of their husbands and fathers. It can be shown that in the Roman period women put on or sponsored public meals.¹³ We have invitations to religious festivals, written on papyri by women. “Sarapous asks you to dine at the offering in honour of Kyria Isis in the house, tomorrow, namely the 29th, from the 9th hour,” (*P. Fouad* 76, 2) or “Herais asks you to dine in the (banquet) room of the Sarapeion at a kline (εἰς κλίνην) of the Lord Sarapis tomorrow, which is the 11th at the 9th hour.” (*P. Coll Youtie* I, 52) Other women invite with such formal invitations to the wedding of their children in their own house.¹⁴ There is hardly reason to doubt that those women also took part in these meals even though it remains open who was invited in each case.

Nepos’ thesis that in Greece women were absolutely excluded from such meals and, in the Roman context, took part only with their husbands is historically false, at least in its sweeping generality. Yet it stands at the beginning of the broad discussion of women in the *deipnon/symposion* or the *cenal convivium* in Roman literature. In early imperial Rome, one frequently hears complaints in political discussions about the decline of manners during the symposia. Seneca, the mentor of Nero, writes:

This does not mean that women’s physique has changed, but that it has been conquered; in revealing male indulgences, they have also revealed the ills to which men are heirs. They keep just as late hours, and drink just as much liquor; they challenge men in wrestling and carousing; they

are not less given to vomiting from distended stomachs and thus to discharging all their wine again.¹⁵

Catherine Edwards shows that the repeated complaint about the decline of morals, including those of women, is a topos in the political discussion of imperial Rome.¹⁶ The ancient discourse on symposia draws on this topic as well.¹⁷ The demeanor of the women present becomes the very measure for the assessment of the symposium as such.¹⁸ In his "The Banquet of the Seven Wise Men," Plutarch describes two women philosophers among those present at the banquet, Melissa and Eumetis. While Melissa reclines at table (*Mor.* 150B) and distributes garlands (150D), Plutarch's sympathy belongs especially to Eumetis (cf. 150B) whom he introduces with highest praise (148C/D.) She is seated during the meal and remains fashionably silent (154A.) Both of the female philosophers leave the banquet before the drinking-session begins (155E) and in so doing behave exactly as Plutarch had counseled the newly-wed Euridike (140B).¹⁹

According to Roman moral-philosophical discourse, a woman becomes prone to sexual misbehavior when she drinks wine and especially when she follows the custom of free men and reclines at table. A status symbol for free men, this position during the meal is discussed in relation to women.²⁰ Valerius Maximus asserts that:

Women used to dine seated with their reclining menfolk, a custom which made its way from the social gatherings of men to things divine. For at the banquet of Jupiter he himself was invited to dine on a couch, while Juno and Minerva had chairs, a form of austerity which our age is more careful to retain on the Capitol than in its houses, no doubt because it is more important to the commonwealth that discipline be maintained for goddesses than for women.²¹

As Matthew Roller shows, the question of whether and under what circumstances a woman may recline at table is reflected in the way women were represented on their tomb stones.²² There are, in fact, such stones on which women are shown reclining at table, similar to the many men in these images.²³ But, according to Roller, when a man of equal status is depicted in the reclining position on his tombstone, the banquet image shows women as sitting. As a sign of affluence and of freedom, the reclining position of a woman among men seems to be considered sexually suspect.

But there is a significant, decisive gap in the discussion concerning women's demeanor at meals. For the meals under discussion there were almost exclusively those occasioned by social obligations. Roughly speaking, one

can distinguish three major reasons for banquet feasts in antiquity: those within religious rituals (sacrificial banquets, religious society meetings), those related to family events (weddings, funeral banquets), and those among friends (philosophers) or clients. As far as we can determine, all those meals are oriented in their basic structure by the culture of the symposium or the convivium. They do not have to differ fundamentally as far as the attending guests, their location, or the religious activities undertaken there are concerned.²⁴ As has often been shown, symposia without a directly religious purpose do include ritual and religious elements.²⁵ Yet the question whether and in what way women took part in them, whether they sit or recline at table and whether they take part in the carousing is discussed in the literature on the symposium almost exclusively in relation to banquets held to fulfill social obligations. Not discussed are genuinely religious festivals. Thus, John Wilkins notes in relation to the repeated criticism in Roman writing of luxurious living:

The dining literature of Rome portrays overwhelmingly adult male diners . . . It is important to note, however, that formal dining was not confined either to the ancient elites or exclusively to men, and that a very different picture of ancient Italian and Mediterranean society would have emerged if the texts had not chosen to concentrate on the urban elites. We might then have seen dining at marriage feasts, at civic festivals, and at other gatherings that were not exclusive to men and were certainly not exclusive to the ruling classes.²⁶

In ancient antiquity, there was widespread acceptance of the notion that women took part in religious festivals and therefore in those symposia and carousing belonging to them.²⁷ Even conservative Cicero, inwardly sneering at having to recline at a table next to a woman actor named Cytheris at a banquet,²⁸ concedes in his *De Legibus* that religious festivals should not be forbidden to women and that women should not be kept away even from the nocturnal festivities of the Eleusinian mysteries. All other such celebrations should take place during the day. "Unintentional offences are carefully to be expiated by the official priest . . . effrontery in introducing disgraceful lust into the midst of religious rites he must condemn and adjudge impious."²⁹ Cicero is aware that this law will not meet with widespread approval.³⁰ In support of his proposal he cites the Bacchanalian scandal and the Bona-Dea Festival scandal of the year 62 BCE. But in spite of the association of those scandals with religious festivities not even the cult of Dionysios was permanently prohibited in Rome.³¹ In fact, as Jorunn Økland shows:

All the texts contain in some way notions of women in cultic settings. Taking place both in sanctuaries and in open-air spaces of the city, the cult activities of women do not fit the axiom of the 'seclusion and exclusion' of women from public male space. Women went in and out of temples and sanctuaries. Women of all ranks participated in religious festivals in non-domestic spaces, not only females with 'open bodies' – slaves and prostitutes – but also poor, freeborn laboring women and even 'respectable' matrons. In fact the latter had to attend religious ceremonies in order to fulfil their special cultic obligations.³²

Apart from the question to what extent the discussion of women in meal gatherings of antiquity represents the actual behavior of women at those gatherings, this discourse reveals a decisive void, that "space in the fabric." The texts simply do not address those symposia where women and marginalized groups are predominantly present. I will now elucidate women's participation in religious festive meals using Jewish festivals as my source.

Women at Jewish Meals

Jewish literature, too, took up the symposium as a literary genre.³³ In those symposia Jewish sages (males) dine with kings of this world and endow them with their wisdom while dining. Sirach instructs students pursuing wisdom how to behave at table.³⁴ The following instruction in table behavior is found among his counsel concerning conduct with (strange) women. "Never sit with another man's wife, nor dine with her at wine; so that your soul will not turn aside to her and with your spirit you slip into destruction" (Sir 9:9, LXX).³⁵ But this does not mean that Jewish women did not take part in symposia.³⁶ They are present as a matter of course in religious symposia. According to Philo, at the Passover meal the "whole people are present, old and young alike raised for the particular day to the dignity of the priesthood" (*Spec.* 2:145) and the "whole nation performs the sacred rites" (*Ibid.*).³⁷ For Philo and the rabbis that means at least that women did participate in Passover meals that had the form of a symposium.³⁸ Moreover, the prohibition from the Mishnah and Tosefta, "They do not form an association (*haburoth*) of women, slaves and children" (*m. Pesah.* 8:7 and *t. Pesah.* 8:6) might signal that this did happen on occasion. The Tosefta explicitly states the reason: "so as not to increase licentiousness."³⁹ Women celebrate the Passover, for, as Philo states: "the festival is a reminder (*ὑπόμνημα*) of the thank-offering for the great migration from Egypt which was made by more than two million men and women (*ἄνδρες ὁμοῦ καὶ γυναῖκες*) in obedience to the oracles vouchsafed to them."⁴⁰ The Mishnah stipulates that

everyone, including the poor and slaves, are to eat the meal in a reclining position (*m. Pesah.* 10:1) because, as the Jerusalem Talmud elaborates, this is how they affirm that they have been led from slavery into freedom (*y. Pesah.* (10:1), 37b: 66–71).⁴¹ Every participant drinks at least four goblets of wine.⁴²

The Sabbath, too, was associated with meals.⁴³ Philo calls this πανηγυρίειν, celebrating a public festival where one engages in genuine philosophy (*Mos.* 2: 211–212). Josephus asserts that:

there is not one city, Greek or barbarian, nor a single nation, to which our custom of abstaining from work on the seventh day has not spread, and where the feasts (αἱ νηστεῖαι) and the lighting of lamps and many of our prohibitions in the matter of food (πολλὰ τῶν εἰς βρῶσιν ἡμῶν) are not observed.⁴⁴

And Philo compares the Passover-meals to a symposium:

The guests assembled for a banquet (σεσσίτια) have been cleansed by purificatory lustrations, and are not as in other symposia (συμπόσια) to indulge the belly with wine and viands, but to fulfill with prayers and hymns the custom handed down by their fathers (*Spec.* 2:148).

He often emphasizes that Jewish festive meals are distinct from those of the surrounding culture in restraint, good morals, and in the striving for true philosophy and bliss.⁴⁵ In his account of the life of the Therapeutae he has left us one of the rare actual descriptions of a religious meal. According to Joan Taylor's extensive discussion, one may observe how Philo—who elsewhere affirms a restrictive morality for women (*Spec.* 3.169–171; *Hypoth.* 7.3)—tries in *De vita contemplativa* to reconcile those Alexandrian women philosophers with this Jewish ideal.⁴⁶ For example, he asserts that the women present at these symposia are “mostly aged virgins” (*Contempl.* 68) “in order to insist on the women’s lack of sexual licentiousness.”⁴⁷ The women recline at table, however, and the text then refers to the separation of the sexes in the seating arrangement, at least at the beginning of the symposium (*Contempl.* 69).⁴⁸ But in the course of the subsequent vigil (παννυχίς) when the chorus of Moses and Miriam dramatizes the Exodus, the sexes intermingle (85–89).

Then they sing hymns to God composed of many measures and set to many melodies, sometimes chanting together, sometimes taking up the harmony antiphonally, hands and feet keeping time in accompaniment, and rapt with enthusiasm (ἐπιθειάζοντες) reproduce sometimes the lyrics

of the procession (προσόδια), sometimes of the halt (στάσιμα) and of the wheeling and counter-wheeling of a choric dance. When each of the choirs is seated, as in the Bacchic rites they drink the unmixed (wine) of God's love, they mix themselves together and become one choir out of two, an imitation (μίμημα) of that, which in old times stands beside the Red Sea in horror of the wonders there wrought. . . . They are drunk until dawn with this beautiful drunkenness (καλὴ μέθη), with no heavy head or dozing, but they are roused more awake than when they came into the dining room (συμπόσιον).⁴⁹

Here Philo identifies the Therapeutae's ecstasy with the Dionysiac vigils. He speaks of Bacchic enthusiasm, of intoxication and beautiful or honorable drunkenness (καλὴ μέθη). At first glance, this would contradict Philo's aim of depicting the Therapeutae women as virtuous. For the Dionysiac mysteries, which Livius states were temporarily banned from Rome on account of their sexual excesses during the vigils (the Bacchanalian scandals that had caused Cicero to contemplate prohibiting such religious vigils for women, *Spec.* 2: 35–38,) could well have become the locus classicus for keeping women from such enthusiastic rites at which both sexes were present. But that was precisely not the case even in Rome, in spite of the Bacchanalian scandal. In Bacchanalian cults, too, one must honor the rites proper to the gods. While the Therapeutae's symposium does outdo the feasts of Bacchus, the emphasis does not rest solely on leaving the body when the sexual division of humans is overcome.⁵⁰ Rather, as Shelly Matthews demonstrates:

“Philo's use of this Bacchanalian imagery suggests that he does not view it as damaging to his apologetic aims. He seems, instead, to be working with a tradition that viewed this practice as virtuous.”⁵¹

The analogy with the Bacchus festivals justifies the intermixing of the sexes during the ideal meal of the Therapeutae.

Women take part in the religious symposia with the same status symbols as men: reclining at table and drinking wine. By legitimizing the participation of the Therapeutae in the context of Dionysiac religion, Philo, who knows and makes frequent use of the Roman criticism of the symposia, provides clear evidence that religious festivals are a unique category that goes beyond the moral–philosophical discourse on women's table manners. Religious traditions and moral–philosophical discourse are at odds, creating voids, “spaces in the fabric,” that once again show that there existed women's ways of celebrating these symposia beyond what has been mentioned about them. Symposia as such and symposia within religious rites represent

different categories even within that moral–philosophical discourse on the participation of women in meals. With this in mind, I now turn to the New Testament evidence.

Women at Meal Gatherings in Luke and Mark

In the gospels, women are rarely explicitly mentioned in connection with meal gatherings. The woman bringing the ointment (Mark 14: 3–9; Matt 26: 5–13), or the sinful woman (Luke 7:25–50), joins the *deipnon/symposium* as an outsider and only after it has begun.⁵² The interpretation that the table community was exclusively male is possibly influenced by John 12:2.⁵³ But that it was only men is not stated.⁵⁴ Another woman mentioned in the context of a meal is Peter's mother-in-law who serves Jesus, Peter, and others (διακονεῖν, Mark 1:31 par).⁵⁵ The only other places where women are explicitly mentioned in meal-narratives are the narratives of the feeding of the multitudes in Matt 14:21 and 15:38. Do the authors of the other gospels wish to imply that women are not present at other meals? In my judgment, the gospels have to be assessed differently, each according to the question whether and how they share in the above-mentioned discourse concerning the ancient culture of the symposium.

As many have observed, Luke gives the symposium thematic a prominent place; he has a series of “table talks.”⁵⁶ In his gospel, they are Jesus' “mode of teaching.”⁵⁷ There are themes such as “ranking at table” (Lk 14:8–11; 20:46, par.; Mark 22:24–27), “questions of table etiquette” (5:34–35; 7:44–46; 11:38–40), “the practice of inviting guests” (14:12–14), and “preparation for table” (17:7–10). Another theme plays a role throughout Luke's gospel: the criticism of luxurious eating at banquets.⁵⁸ For Luke table fellowship is a symbol of community fellowship.⁵⁹ The eschatological expectation is portrayed essentially in terms of the joy of feasting.⁶⁰ After all, Luke is also familiar with Mark's prominent theme of “serving” (διακονεῖν), but only in Mark is it placed explicitly into the context of serving at table.⁶¹ While “serving” is the model for the women and men disciples in Mark, (cf. Mark 9:34; 10:43–44) and he has Jesus say “the Son of Man came not into the world to be served but to serve,” (10:45) Luke incorporates only one of those references and reshapes it characteristically: “but I am among you as one who serves” (ὥς ὁ διακονῶν, Luke 22:27). Here Jesus, like the master (ὁ κύριος) in the parable of the watchful slaves (Luke 12: 35–38), slips into the role of a servant and rewards the faithful slaves with a role reversal (12:37).⁶² This role reversal presupposes that Jesus is the real head of the household. The apostles and disciples are his table companions (22:15–30; 24:30). Besides 12:35–38 there is only one other pericope in Luke where the apostles are

addressed as table-servers: the parable of the useless servant (17:7–10).⁶³ The remaining places either depict women as serving (4:39; 7:35–50; 10:40) or the issue of who serves at table remains open.⁶⁴ Acts 6:2 explicitly emphasizes that “It is not right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on table (διακονεῖν τραπέζαις).”

Thus, whereas women in Luke are assigned to wait on table, there is only one place where he depicts a woman taking part in a banquet, namely Luke 10:38–42.⁶⁵ Mary sits quite conspicuously at the feet of Jesus (παρακαθίζειν). In view of Luke’s familiarity with symposium literature and moral-philosophical discourse, this is not coincidental. Rather, he consciously avoids the depiction of women reclining at table and drinking wine. Despite the prominence in his gospel of the symposium thematic as the locus of Jesus’ teaching, Luke generally hides behind a veil of silence when it comes to discussing women as participants in the meal gatherings. This creates an open door for a variety of interpretations.⁶⁶

Compared to Luke, the Gospel of Mark deals at first glance rather critically with the subject of the symposium. The scurrilous entertainment provided by the dancing princess at Herod’s symposium for the powerful of the land leads to catastrophe for John the Baptist as well as for Herod himself (Mark 6:14–29).⁶⁷ Elsewhere the unseemly practice of competing for the honor of “the first chair” at the table is compared to exploiting widows (12:39–40). In contrast to Mark’s symposium critique one must consider the feeding of the multitudes in this gospel. Mark duplicates this scene in 6:32–44 and 8:1–9 and joins it explicitly to what the disciples tell Jesus of the mission-work they have just completed.⁶⁸ The setting of the feeding pericope in the wilderness, the fact that the multitude is lying on the grass and divided into groups, some numbering 100 and others 50, alludes to Israel’s history in the desert.⁶⁹ Israel’s sojourn in the wilderness is both a story of divine guidance and care and a story of crisis. Whereas the crisis is introduced in the failures of the disciples, the feeding itself has a utopian character. Only here in Mark’s gospel do we find the expression “to recline at table at the symposium (ἀνακλῖναι πάντας συμπόσια).”⁷⁰ All assume the position of the free elite, just as in the rabbinical Passover liturgies. Moreover, Richard Pervo has called our attention to the political references of this narrative.⁷¹ Whereas in most private banquets the distribution of food was organized according to the rank and social position of citizens and only a fraction of what they received was then given, if at all, to the poorer part of the population and to women, Mark has all those invited receive more than they need to be satisfied (Mark 6:35–44 and 8:1–9). This equitable distribution among all social groups, however, is a characteristic feature of religious festivals in the ancient world. It is almost exclusively religious festivals to which free people, slaves,

and strangers are invited at all.⁷² “When the poor did receive anything like equality it would be upon a religious occasion.”⁷³ That is why the multitude Mark speaks of, the five thousand men (πεντα κισχίλιοι ἄνδρες, (6:44)) and four thousand (8:9) could not have excluded women at all. Such exclusion would not be expected in the context of Israel’s experience in the wilderness. The concept ἄνδρες is also used generically in Greek. When Matthew adds “besides women and children” in 14:21 and 15:38, he does so in large part to raise the total number of those fed.⁷⁴

It is my view that in the New Testament it is Luke above all who raises the question of the participation of women in symposia. The symposium culture is an important basic feature in his narrative of Jesus. Thus, if he does not assert explicitly that women reclined with Jesus at table anywhere in his narrative, it is certainly not incidental. The Gospel of Mark, on the other hand, brings that ancient symposium culture into a critical perspective. His counter-image is found in the feedings in the wilderness where, in the tradition of the religious festival, all are fed and satisfied. By emphasizing the διακονεῖν as the disciples’ task (9:35; 10:43–44) Mark holds Peter’s mother-in-law up as the role model for the circle whose miracle experiences open his gospel (1:31.) The woman anointing Jesus points toward his passion with her symbolic action and, in so doing, takes up his allusions to his coming suffering (8:31–39; 9:30–32; 10: 33–34) that the other disciples fail to understand. It is not for nought that her symbolic action in Mark is taken to be an integral component of the entire Gospel of Christ.⁷⁵

The feedings in the wilderness recall the Exodus and God’s solicitude on the journey through the desert en route to the new land. We do not know whether those feedings were associated with a ritual practice.⁷⁶ But another meal narrated in the gospels is certainly rooted in a ritual practice, namely Jesus’ final meal with his followers (Mark 14: 22–25, par).

Women and the Origins of the Lord’s Supper

None of the gospels explicitly names women among those present at this meal. The Synoptics follow Mark in describing Judas—one of the twelve—as a traitor in the context of the words of institution. What can still be seen clearly in Mark is that the narrative of that final meal is composed of three parts: the narrative of finding the upper room (14: 12–16, itself a doublet of finding the colt, 11:1–7), the description of the betrayer (14:18–21), and, finally, the account of the words of institution (22–25).⁷⁷ Mark puts creates transitions between them.⁷⁸ Both the meal narratives of 14:18–21 and 22–25 begin with the expression καὶ ἐσθιόντων (“While they were eating . . .”). It is

the narrative frame alone that creates the impression that 12 men were present at this meal.⁷⁹

One version of the words of institution is taken up by Paul already; this indicates the great age of the tradition he hands down. He, too, combines his citation of the words of institution with a passion narrative by introducing the phrase: “the night in which he was handed over” (1 Cor 11:22).⁸⁰ But I think it is improbable that those words go back to the historical Jesus himself; they already embody theological interpretations of Jesus’ death.⁸¹ It is more likely that this text was always related to a meal practice.

This brings to view the third important context of early Christian meal gatherings tradition, namely meals and symposia for family occasions.⁸² The wedding-meal is a prominent image in the New Testament and here women are mentioned as a matter of course among those present.⁸³ In contrast, funeral banquets play a subordinate role in the narrative tradition.⁸⁴ In what follows I make the assumption that the words of institution refer to the context of an original funeral banquet that formed part of the experience of Jesus’ resurrection.

In antiquity it was generally held that it was the task of women to care for and to lament the dead.⁸⁵ The stories of the empty tomb (Mark 16:1–8, par) and of the anointing (14:3–9, par) tell nothing different. The rabbis also held that no one should be buried without at least one wailing woman.⁸⁶ Unfortunately, hardly any authentic laments of Jewish women have survived.⁸⁷ But comparative cultural studies have shown an astonishing consistency in ancient and modern laments of Greek women.⁸⁸ In some ancient and modern forms the laments first recall the suffering and death of the lamented, then invoke their presence, and become channels through which the deceased speaks.⁸⁹

Various funeral banquets were customary in Roman times. In addition to the funeral feast (*περίδειπνον*, *silicinium*) there were rites for feeding the dead at the graveside and meals in memory of the deceased.⁹⁰ Archeological evidence shows Jewish culture also took up the practice of feeding the dead.⁹¹ Later Christian tradition also indicates that meals were held at the graveside.⁹² In my view, one may well ask whether the women’s lament in association with the practice of funerary banquets or feeding the dead is a locus of origin the tradition of the Lord’s Supper.⁹³

The version of the words of institution handed on by Paul already presupposes a narrative of death and resurrection (cf. 1 Cor 11; 22). As Ellen Aitken has shown, they are initially oral narratives that interpret what happened with the help of Psalms of lament and the tradition of righteous sufferers.⁹⁴ Such interpretations of Scripture are present already in the Pauline version of the words of institution, namely in the interpretation of the word

concerning the bread by τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν (cf. Isa 53) and the phrasing of the word concerning the cup: “this cup is the new covenant in my blood,” alluding to Exodus 24 and Jeremiah 31.⁹⁵

Yet I believe it is still worth asking whether one can discover the origin of a meal tradition behind the New Testament traditions of the Lord’s Supper. Whatever differences there are, the shared tradition of the word of institution of the bread is conspicuous. Mark and Paul both transmit a short form of that word in τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ σῶμά μου (Mark 14:22 and 1 Cor 11:23). If this plural meal-tradition of the words of institution did indeed point back to an original meal practice, then, in my view, Jerusalem would be the likely place of origin. All traditions available to us locate the meal there, that is, to say in the context of the passion. And that, I think, suggests that the initial event was probably one of women’s practice.

The New Testament locates the resurrection experience in various places. The appearance to “Peter and the Twelve” is announced in Mark and reported in Matthew as taking place in Galilee. The New Testament explicitly names Jerusalem as the place where the risen one appears to Mary Magdalene and the other women and to no one else.⁹⁶ This is where, according to Acts 1:14 women have gathered. In the context of Acts this is an oddity for those women play no role in the calling of Matthias.⁹⁷ Peter returned to Jerusalem but we do not know when. James the brother of Jesus also came to Jerusalem, as Paul affirms in Gal 1:18–19. But these two do not comprise a unified community at the time of the encounter at Antioch, as Gal 2:11–14 asserts in opposition to Acts 1–5.⁹⁸ In light of this, I think, one cannot rule out that before the return of Peter and the arrival of James Mary Magdalene and the other women had already formed a nucleus of the Easter faith community in Jerusalem.⁹⁹

I offer the above few bits of evidence for discussion in the context of the following hypothesis. Behind the praxis of the Lord’s Supper, the condensed interpretation of which is contained in the words of institution, there stands the Jerusalem women’s lament tradition reshaped by the experience of resurrection.¹⁰⁰ The crucified Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene and her women friends during their lament (cf. John 20:18; Matt 28:9–10). Psalms of lament and the tradition of the righteous enduring suffering helped interpret the experience of resurrection. The original version of the words of institution consisted at first (only) of the word concerning the bread.¹⁰¹ While sharing together in a meal, the women met the Risen One. The women experience the presence of the Risen One as a person in the bread of lament.¹⁰² The lamentation meal was transformed into joy through the personal presence of the Risen One.

Conclusion

Women took part in the early Christian meal gatherings. But this praxis would not have been noticed in the context of religious and familial meals. The ideological discourse on women's meal praxis takes place chiefly within the context of symposia on social occasions. While this says nothing about which praxis women followed during such meals, the sources are such that what these women actually did remains to a large extent invisible. But when one looks for the gaps, the empty spaces in the moral–philosophical discussion of the symposia, one sees that some of the chief occasions giving rise to symposia in ancient times are not spoken of at all, particularly the meal praxis related to religious festivals. But here, as I have tried to show, women are present as a matter of course and without any general gender-specific restrictions. In addition, women assume important functions at family festivals, especially at funerals. The question of women challenges the research into early Christian meal praxis in that it shows that the literature on symposia that has been widely relied on until now does not suffice to clarify early Christian meal practice. That literature refers to different meal contexts, namely those of religious festivals, marriages, and funerals. We are still at the beginning stages of research into traditions of meals and hence the meal praxis of women in early Christianity. I hope to have shown in my comments that rewarding fields for further work are to be discovered there.

Notes

1. Corley, *Private Women, Public Meals*; M. Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahl gemeinschaft*; Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*.
2. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 209.
3. Corley, *Private Women, Public Meals*, 25.
4. Corley, *Private Women, Public Meals*, 89–93.
5. Corley, *Private Women, Public Meals*, 178; cf. Matt 14:21; 15:38.
6. Cf. Castelli, “Romans,” 280–1.
7. Effeminate behavior to be avoided by men at symposia includes, according to Lucian, *Symp.* 13, for example: “to sit on a chair,” or according to Clement, *Paed.* 2.49.1: “a weak, broken voice.”
8. Gold, “*Ariadne*,” 75–100, 84.
9. Cornelius Nepos, *Praef.* 6–7 (trans. LCL).
10. Cornelius Nepos, *Praef.* 4: “nulla Lacedaemoni vidua tam est nobilis, quae non ad cenam eat mercede conducta.”
11. Burton, “Women’s Commensality,” 143–165. Cf. Isaeus, *Oratio* 3.14, Theocritus, *Id.* 14. For female philosophers like Hipparchia (Diogenes Laertius 9.98) or Aspasia (Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 13 (569F)) see Taylor, *Jewish*, 173–226.

12. Burton, "Women's Commensality," 160.
13. Donahue, *The Roman Community*, 160–161 lists 46 women as banquet sponsors. But "women were not typically invited to public banquets . . . Furthermore, when women did dine together, the sources emphasize that participation was restricted to women of elite status" (114). There are only few public feedings for women like that of Caesia Sabinae, who "gave a feast to the mothers of the centumviry and to their sisters and daughters and to municipal women of every rank." (*CIL* 11.3811, third century)
14. *POxy* 1579 (third century): "Thermouthis asks you to dine at the wedding of her daughter in her house, tomorrow, which is the 17th, from . . . hour." See also *POxy* 111, Herais invites to the wedding of her children, *POxy* 2678, Dioskorous invites to the wedding of her son. Cf. Chan-Hie Kim, "The Papyrus Invitation," *JBL* 94 (1975): 391–402 and G.H.R. Horsley, "Invitation to the Kline of Sarapis".
15. Seneca, *Ep.* 95.20.
16. Edwards, *Politics*, 34–62.
17. Edwards, *Politics*, 186–190; Anthony Corbeill, "Dining Deviants". See also Juvenal, *Sat.* 6.425–456.
18. On the sexual implications for and with women at a symposion, see for instance Martial, *Epigr.* 5.78; Athenaeus, *Depon.* 13.
19. Cf.: Plutarch, *Mor.* 140B: "The lawful wives of the Persian kings sit beside them at dinner, and eat with them. But when the king wishes to be merry and get drunk, they send their wives away, and send for their music-girls and concubines. In so far they are right in what they do, because they do not concede any share in their licentiousness and debauchery to their wedded wives. If therefore a man in private life, who is incontinent and dissolute in regard to his pleasures, commits some peccadillo with a paramour or a maidservant, his wedded wife ought not to be indignant or angry, but she should reason that it is respect for her which leads him to share his debauchery, licentiousness and wantonness with another women" As will become obvious below, it is no coincidence that Plutarch's counsels regarding behavior at meal gatherings are immediately followed by the observation that women should worship (honor) no other gods than those of their husbands." (*Mor.* 148C).
20. Cf. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 10–11.
21. Valerius Maximus, *Facta et Dicta Memorabilia* 2.1.2. Translation D.R.S. Bailey (LCL).
22. Cf. Roller, "Horizontal Women," 377–8.
23. Roller, "Horizontal Women," Figure b.
24. The festive occasions in the imperial household can become public festivals. Religious festivals such as the women's festival of *Bona Dea* take place in the house of the *praetor*.
25. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 6 etc.
26. Wilkins, "Land and Sea," 370.
27. Donahue, "Typology" compiled a list of such public festivals in Rome, among them the saturnalia, the compitalia, and the festival of Anna Perenna on March

- 15, at which “plebeians celebrated the traditional Roman New Year by singing, drinking and dancing near the Tiber. Here, men and women typically drank as many cups of wine as the number of years they prayed to life.” (431)
28. Cicero, *Fam.* 9.26.2
29. Cicero, *Leg.* 2. 35–38, 2.38.
30. See also Matthews, *First Converts*, 78–9.
31. Occasionally there were expulsions that were associated with scandals, for example, Josephus, *Ant.* 18.64–84. On women at Dionysus Festivals in Greece, see Diodorus Siculus 4.3.3.
32. Økland, “‘In publicum procurerendi,’” 129–3.
33. *Let. Aris.* 180–286; see also *Vita Aesop* 119f.
34. Cf. Sir 31,12–32,13 *passim*, and Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 134–144.
35. This counsel takes on narrative form in *T.Jud.* 13:4–8 where Judas’ father-in-law seats him at table with the Canaanite women and, seduced by wine and her presence, he violates his father’s commands regarding women. This leads to a paraenesis against the consumption of wine, which leads to debauchery (*T.Jud.* 14:1–8).
36. Brothers, who invite their sisters to a meal: Job 1.14.18; 42,11; *T.Job* 15:3. Women, who invite Men to dinner: Esth 5:5, 9; 7:1, 8; *Jos. Asen.* 20,1.
37. Cf. Philo, *QE* 1.10.
38. On the influence of the Symposium form on rabbinic Passover liturgy, see Stein, “Influence.” Josephus asserts in the context of the last Passover festival of the captives in Jerusalem: “those afflicted with leprosy or gonorrhea, or menstruous women, or persons otherwise defiled were not permitted to partake of the sacrifice, nor yet any foreigners present for the worship (οὐδὲ τοῖς ἀλλοφύλοις, ὅσοι κατὰ θρησκείαν, *B.J.* 6.427). The rule, however, applies to participation in the festival in Jerusalem (see also *m. Pesah.* 9.4, likewise for Jerusalem). There is no indication that these rules applied for Alexandria and the diaspora as well.
39. *t. Pesah.* 8.6: translated by Neusner. In the Mishnah and Tosefta, coincidentally, there is discussion about who should slaughter meat for women and how often a woman can eat. (*t. Pesah.* 7.4; *m. Pesah.* 8.1).
40. *Spec.* 2.146. Translation Colson, LCL. The Babylonian Talmud has two traditions on this question, first the general statement: “Our Rabbis taught: All are bound to [drink] the four cups, men, women, and children” (*b. Pesah.* 108b). Later, in the discussion of the tradition: “Our Rabbis taught: A man is in duty bound to make his children and his household rejoice on a Festival” two Rabbis are quoted with gender specific substitutions: “Men with what is suitable for them, and women with, what is suitable for them. ‘Men with what is suitable for them’: with wine. And women with what? R. Joseph recited: in Babylonia, with colored garments; in Eretz Yisrael, with ironed lined garments.
41. The discussion about women reclining at table is only documented very late (*b. Pesah.* 108a; *y. Pesah.* (10,1) 37b,66–71). The practice is explicitly confirmed. In the Babylonian Talmud there is discussion of the issue whether women need

their own reclining couch. This is answered in the negative for married women accompanied by their husbands, but in the affirmative for women of high social status (*b. Pesah.* 108a).

42. According to a Baraita from the Tosefta (*t. Pesah.* 10:4) "it is a religious duty for a man to bring joy to his children and dependents at the festival . . . with wine, since it says, . . . wine to gladden the heart of man" (Ps 104:15). The Talmud does then suggest substituting gifts for the wine (*y. Pesah.* (10) 37b,72–76; *b. Pesah.* 109a).
43. See Safrai, "Religion," 804–7; Philo, *Contempl.* 36; Josephus, *Vita* 279.
44. Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.282. It would be interesting to know if at that time women used to light candles at Sabbath eve.
45. Vgl. *Contempl.* 40–63; *Spec.* 1.176–7; *Flacc.* 137 etc.
46. Vgl. Taylor, *Jewish Women*, 227–310. Taylor describes as aim of the writing "to impress an audience not composed of Jews." (346)
47. Taylor, *Jewish Women*, 249.
48. *Contempl.* 69: "The order of reclining is so apportioned that the men sit by themselves on the right and the women by themselves on the left" (trans. LCL).
49. *Contempl.* 84–5.89. Translation mine with help from LCL.
50. So Taylor, *Jewish Women*, 311–340.
51. Matthews, *First Converts*, 81. Philo is not the only writer who compares Jewish meal gathering praxis with the Dionysiac praxis. One can observe similar trends outside Judaism as well. Josephus cites a writing of Julius Caesar that guarantees the Jews of Delos the right "to live in accordance with their customs and to contribute money to common meals (σύνδειπνα) and sacred rites." The Consul Gaius Caesar is said to have granted this in Rome, i.e., σύνδειπνα ποιεῖν, as well, although it appears he prohibited all others θιάσοι (*A.J.* 14.214–5). A certain Moiragenes of Athens appears in Plutarch's *Questiones convivales* who considers the Jewish festivals, including the Sabbath, bacchanalian festivals: "The Jews themselves testify to a connection with Dionysus, when they keep the Sabbath by inviting each other to drink and to enjoy wine" (*Mor.* 672a).
52. Mark 14:3: ἦλθεν, Matt 26:7: προσῆλθεν. In Luke, who has a longer narrative telling of her preparation (7:37), she comes and stands before Jesus. The story is interpreted below as a foot-washing ceremony belonging to a meal gathering.
53. "There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served (διακονεῖν), and Lazarus was one of those who reclined (ἀνακαίσθαι) with him" (John 12:2).
54. Besides the reclining Jesus, the other meal participants in Mark's narrative (Mark 14:3; Lk 7:36; John 12:3) are referred to non-specifically as "some" (τινες; Mark 14:4); in Matthew it is the disciples (οἱ μαθηταί Matt 26,8) and in Luke a Pharisee and others reclining at table (7:36; οἱ συνανακείμενοι 7:49).
55. The text is controversial in all the gospels. External evidence speaks for reading the text as διηκόνει αὐτῷ in Matt 8:15, whereas the majority of the best witnesses to the manuscripts read Mark 1:31 and Lk 4:39 as διηκόνει αὐτοῖς.

The interpretation of the word in Mark 15:41 is controversial within feminist theological discussion. Where Mark says that the women beneath the cross “used to follow him and to serve him when he was in Galilee,” the phrase in this context certainly not only connotes service at table, but is an inclusive formulation chosen to connote the Markan concept of discipleship (cf. Mark 9:35; 10:43–45). Peter’s mother-in-law is the only person about whom this act of service (διακονεῖν) is told in the Gospel of Mark.

56. Smith, “Table Fellowship as a Literary Motif,” 614.
57. Luke 5:29–39; 7:35–40; 11:37–52; 14:1–21 and 22:14–38.
58. Luke 6:24–25; 12:19, 45(Q); 16:19–20; 17:27(Q); 21:34.
59. Luke 5:27–32 (Mark); 7:34(Q); 13:26 (Q); 15:2, 22–32.
60. Luke 12:35–38; 13:28–29(Q); 14:15, 16–24(Q), 16:21–24; 22:15–18, 30. Both the critique of luxury and the theme of eschatological banquet delights are thematized as early as in the Sayings Source, but Luke elaborates on them especially in the parables unique to him and the narratives setting up examples to follow (12:16–19, 35–38; 15:11–32 16:19–31).
61. Luke 4:38; 10:40; 12:37; 17:8; 22:26–27.
62. Luke 12:37: “Blessed are those servants (οἱ δοῦλοι) whom the master (ὁ κύριος) finds awake when he comes; truly, I say to you, he will gird himself (περιζώσεται) and have them recline at table (ἀνακλινεῖ αὐτούς), and he will come and serve them (παρελθὼν διακονήσει αὐτοῖς).”
63. Luke 17:7–10: Will any one of you, who has a servant (δοῦλον) . . . say to him when he has come in from the field, come at once and recline at table (παρελθὼν ἀνάπεσε)? 17:8 Will he not rather say to him, prepare supper for me, and gird yourself and serve me (περιζώσάμενος διακόνει μοι), till I eat and drink; and afterward you shall eat and drink? 17:9 Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? 17:10 So you also, when you have done all that is commanded you, say, We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.” The disciples have no claim to the changing of roles in Luke 12:35–37.
64. Luke 22:30; Acts 2:42–46; 20:7
65. One meal gathering is, however, not mentioned specifically here, but it can be surmised from the scene, analogous to 4:38–39; 5:29–32; 10:5–7; 11:37–52; 14:1–24.
66. I largely agree with Corley, *Women*, 145: “Of all the evangelists . . . Luke is indeed familiar with the literary images of women in the symposia settings and the social criticism of women’s behavior at meals which these literary themes influenced. Hence, women and “sinners” do not join Jesus at the table.” Quesnell, “Women”, 59–79, argues for the opposite conclusion: “Luke thought of women as part of that community, sharing in all its life and actions. When he showed that community gathered for the Last Supper, he never imagined future readers might doubt that the women were present” (71).
67. Pervo, “Panta Konia,” 165 designates this meal “a lower-class parody of the manners of *les Aristos*.”

68. Vgl. Fowler, *Loaves and Fishes*, 91–148. The disciples do not only consider the feeding of the multitudes impossible but also refuse to cooperate; they do not understand what has happened even after the fact (cf. Mark 8, 14–21).
69. According to Exodus 18:21,25, Numbers 31:14, and Deuteronomy 1:15, Israel wanders through the desert in divisions of thousand, hundred and fifty. The greening of the desert is a sign of salvation (Isa 35:1–2, 41:19, 43,20, 2 Bar. 29:5–8) and of divine care (Ps 23:2).
70. At all other instances Mark uses for “recline” the verbs κατακεῖσθαι (2:15; 14:3), (συν)ἀνακεῖσθαι (2:15; 6:22, 26; 14:8), or ἀναπίπτειν (6:40; 8:6).
71. Cf. Pervo, “Panta Koinia,” 188: “The groupings of fifty and one-hundred . . . also parallel the means by which rations were distributed and the populace arranged for the civic festival.”
72. *BCH* 1891, 184f No. 29: (second CE) “Theophilus son of Theophilus of Hierakome and priestess Tryphera . . . opening the sacred refectory of the god to every class and age and to the out-of town visitors with the most ready goodwill and lavish generosity” (translation A. R. Hands, *Charities*, 190). Other examples: Pervo, “Panta Koina,” 186.
73. Pervo, “Panta Koina,” 186.
74. Philo in *Spec.* 2.146 enlarges the six hundred thousand men leaving Egypt (Exod 12:37) to “two millions of men and women.”
75. Matthew narrows the gospel concept: ὅπου ἐὰν κηρυχθῇ τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦτο. Thus, what is important is the narrating of her story and not the gospel itself. It is well known that the other gospels omit this sentence.
76. For Pervo, “Panta Koina,” 192, “[o]ne function of the feedings stories was to hold up to leaders models of care for the poor of their community.” (Cf. also the technical term σιτομέτριος in Luke 12,42). In my opinion this observation applies especially to Luke’s gospel.
77. See among others Robbins, “Last Meal.”
78. In Mark’s narrative at least 15 people take part in the meal gathering. The two disciples sent ahead and the 12 who arrive with Jesus (cf. Mark 14:17).
79. Quesnell, “Women” shows that one can question this even within the gospels. For Mark, cf. the previous note.
80. Unfortunately we do not know the passion narrative of Paul. Compare for a reconstruction Aitken, *Jesus’s Death*, 27–54. It is especially not clear whether Paul had known about the betrayer Judas.
81. See Smith, “Table Fellowship and the Historical Jesus,” 141–3; Koester, “The Memory.” Koester points to an observation of Günther Bornkamm: “Paul says that he received this tradition ‘from the Lord’ (ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου). This is intriguing. It cannot mean that it was Jesus himself who communicated this formula to Paul. In that case one would expect the preposition παρά [with genitiv] rather than ἀπὸ” (344).
82. A connection between burials and religious festivals attended by women was seen in antiquity. Plutarch asserts that Solon “subjected the public appearances of the women, their mourning and their festivals, to a law which did away with disorder and licence” (*Solon* 20,4).

83. Wedding banquet: Mark 2:19–20 par.; Matt 22:1–14; Luke 14:15–24; *Gos. Thom.* 64; Rev 19:9; 20:2; Women at a wedding banquet Matt 25:1–13, John 2:1–10.
84. Such meals are suggested, however, in John 11:45 and Mark 5:43 par.
85. For the biblical period cf. Schroer, “Häusliche und außerhäusliche religiöse Kompetenzen.” For the Greek area cf. Karen Stears, “Death Becomes Her.” For the Roman area: Prescendi, “Klagende Frauen”.
86. *M. Ketubbot* 4.4; *m. Mo’ed Qaṭan* 3.8–9 differentiates between lamentation (עיניי), which was sung together and wailing (קירה) as a antiphony.
87. The Talmud has preserved in *b. Mo’ed Qaṭan* 28b a collection of Aramaic laments of the women of Shoken-Zeb in the name of Rab. Moreover *4 Macc.* 16:6–11 articulates a hypothetical lament of the mother over the loss of her sons. *4 Eszra* 9:26ff represents a woman lamenting her son. *L.A.B.* 40:5–7 articulates the lament of Jephta. Whether any of these laments can be traced back to a known women’s praxis must remain uncertain. It is striking that the women in *4 Macc.* and *4 Eszra* lament themselves above all else. The songs of the daughters of Job which they raise in the funeral procession, are, by contrast, called “songs of the father” (*T. Job* 52:12). The daughters in this context are expressly gifted with the heavenly tongues (*T. Job* 47–53). Another funeral hymn is then begun by the brother with the sons and the whole people (53:1–5). This hymn of mourning, like Jephta’s lament, which is sung to her as the dying one, is characterized by the same motifs as the psalms of lament. Thus Jephta’s lament corresponds not only to the laments of the women of Shoken-Zept (*b. Mo’ed Qaṭan* 28b), which focus on the deceased son, but also to the observations of modern anthropological research on women’s lament rituals in Greece. A further source of women’s songs of lament might be the biblical songs of lament. Cf. Schroer, “Häusliche und außerhäusliche religiöse Kompetenzen,” 12.
88. Alexiou, *Lament*; Holst-Warhaft, *Dangerous Voices*.
89. Alexiou, *Lament*, 58–60; 108–110. For modern Greece, Vgl. Caraveli, “Wounding”.
90. The idea of a common meal with the dead is not developed until Hellenic and Roman times. Cf. Murray, “Death and Symposion.” For Roman times: on feeding the dead, see Lucian, *Char.* 22, *Luct.* 9; Epiphanias, *Anacrotus* 86,4–5; on the idea of a wake with the deceased, Petronius, *Sat.* 65,11; Artemidorus, *Oneiocritus* 5,85. On Greek vases women are often depicted in libation scenes near a stele. Cf. also Lindsay, “Eating with the Dead,” 67–80; Klauck, *Umwelt*, 73–76.
91. Cf. Hachlili, “Ancient Burial,” 34. Compare also the observations of Hecataeus of Abdera, cited in *Diodorus Siculus* 40.3.8 and the funeral association (*haburoi*) mentioned in *t. Megillah* 3.15.
92. For instance *Acts John* 72.
93. See further: Standhartinger, “Dies ist mein Leib.” Cf. Corley, *Maranatha*. The formula of commemoration cited by Paul, εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν (1 Cor 11:24, 25) is also found in the dedications of commemorative meal gatherings,

- e.g., Diogenes Laertius 10.18 as well as on numerous inscriptions, cf. Laum, *Stiftungen*, Nr. 126.203 etc.
94. The question whether and how psalms of lament played a role in the laments of Jewish women must remain unanswered given the current state of research. The laments of the women of Shoken-Zep, according to Feldman (*Defilement*, 131) are poetically formulated, to be sure, but differently than the 21 other laments Feldman compiled in rabbinical literature: “the women’s laments make no allusion to the Bible.” By contrast, Jephta’s lament (*L.A.B.* 40: 5–7) takes up motifs from the psalms of lament.
 95. Aitken, “Eucharistic Memory,” 364.
 96. Nor Peter, for in Luke 24:34 the writer leaves the question conspicuously open where the Resurrected One appeared to Peter.
 97. Luke even seems to consider male gender an important criterion for the candidates, cf. Acts 1:21.
 98. Cf. Gal 2:12. Another gathering takes place in the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark, and her maid Rhoda, according to Acts 12:12–13. Cf. also Smith, “Jerusalem Church”.
 99. See further: Standhartinger, “Die Frauen von Jerusalem”.
 100. The meal gathering as a sign of recognition of the Risen One is also found in later New Testament and non-canonical tradition; cf. Luke 24:30–32; John 21, 7–14; *Gos. Heb. Fragment 6* (Jerome, *Vir. ill.* III.III.2). Jesus appears in each of these cases to men, however.
 101. On the subject of funeral bread, see Hos 9:4; Jer 16:16; Tob 4:17; Sir 7:33. By contrast, a critical view of gifts to the dead is Sir 30:18. The setting out (*παραιθηναι*) of funeral bread (*ἄρτος πένθιμος*) appears as part of the rites of lamentation in Gregory of Nazianzus (*Oratio* 15,9).
 102. If the words of institution were first formulated in the original Jerusalem church community, then their original language was presumably Aramaic. The probable Aramaic equivalent for *σῶμα* is *guph*, body, person, self, substance. Cf. Wünsche, *Neue Beiträge*, 331–2; Jeremias, *Abendmahlsworte*, 190ff; Dalman, *Jesus Jeschua*, 129–30. It is thus possible that the primary function of the word of institution of the bread was to express the personal presence of the Risen One during the meal celebration.

CHAPTER 7

Remembering and Remembered Women in Greco-Roman Meals

Ellen Bradshaw Aitken

This essay undertakes a reconsideration of the representation of women as participants in the practices associated with meals in the Greco-Roman world, with a particular focus on the first centuries ce and on the meal practice of early Christian communities. This essay proceeds less as an argument and more as a proposal of a heuristic approach; it thus seeks to delineate an agenda for future inquiry, not only about women at meals, but also concerning the role of what I call the “performance of tradition about Jesus” within the setting of the meal. The essay thus proceeds with broad strokes, gesturing toward a possible way of reconstructing and interpreting fragments of evidence.

Among the many aspects of women’s participation at early Christian meals that we may consider, the question at the heart of this essay pertains to the role of women in the formation and transmission of traditions about Jesus within the context of the meal. This question arises out of the core presupposition of the “symposium model” for the early Christian meal and for Greco-Roman meals in general, as advanced by Matthias Klinghardt and Dennis Smith.¹ The symposium model suggests a basic two-part structure to the meal, namely the *deipnon*, at which the food was consumed, and the *symposium* proper, an occasion for philosophical discussion, entertainment, and various types of performance. I suggest that the connection between the two parts of the meal is not considered solely in sequential terms, but also as interrelated such that the “meal” in total provides a generative matrix for

the performances of the *symposium* proper. In other words, I am interested in the ways in which the symposium model helps to explain the formation and transmission of formal utterances about Jesus in early Christian communities, such as narrative, song, and sayings. Elsewhere I have argued, in the case of 1 Corinthians, that the meal practices of the community provide the occasion for the development of narrative traditions concerning Jesus' suffering and death.² Here I am using "occasion" in a strong sense, that is, as a set of practices of reenactment that contribute to the constitution of a community's identity and interact with the performative speech events of the tradition itself. In this essay, I turn to the ways in which thinking of the symposium as a generative matrix for performance traditions can help in comprehending the role of women as participants both in the meal practices and in the practices of traditions of performative speech. Thus, I seek to understand the activity of women in the meal as producers and users, as agents of tradition, in the process of remembering Jesus.

A guiding theoretical orientation in this essay pertains to the poetics of performance. In this regard I take a cue from the study of the Homeric tradition, which points to a relationship between what is remembered and the process of remembering itself within a tradition.³ That is to say, in the Homeric poems, the ways in which the heroes are remembered as performers of speech acts provide a point of entrance to understanding the poetics of performance informing the production of the poems themselves. Here, similarly, I inquire into the representation in texts of women as, in one way or another, bearers of tradition ("remembering women") and as remembered in relation to meals. On the basis of the interaction between the two poles (women who remember and women who are remembered), I suggest that it is possible to begin to make a case for women as performers of tradition in the context of the meal in early Christian communities and elsewhere.

After a brief discussion of my working presuppositions, I first examine four "moments" for thinking about women as remembering and producers of tradition. Second, I turn to an investigation of two modalities whereby women are remembered in the context of the meal, each of which is suggestive of a conception of the woman as a performer of tradition or communal memory. Third, in order to understand these modalities and to make a case for how women might be performers of tradition, it is necessary to ask whether women's presence at some meals (or in some meal contexts) should be understood as normative or transgressive. How are they remembered? That is, can we ever understand women's performance at the symposium as in keeping with the values of the particular gathering, as those are figured in the text? Are there cases or sets of practices where women's presence and performance are assumed and not marked as transgressive either of "local" norms (i.e., the norms of that type of gathering) or of the norms of meal

practice in general? In each section, I raise *in nuce* a set of instances relating to each dimension of the investigation and then outline a series of questions that may appropriately be asked.

Among my working presuppositions are the two mentioned above. First, I take as a given that meal practice was one of the locations or matrices for the formation and transmission of Jesus-traditions as utterances, authoritative speech-acts, or performances within community. It is perhaps most convenient to label these as “narrative traditions,” based on the indications in 1 Corinthians 11 and 15, but further work needs to be done on other types of authoritative performance, particularly song traditions, including lamentation, and the expansion of sayings traditions in the context of the meal. Thus, although I refer primarily to narrative traditions, I do not intend to exclude other types of performance. Second, I presuppose that the symposium model for the meal provides a productive way of looking at the interaction of meal and performance, of eating and speaking in sets of marked practices.

The other working presuppositions for this essay pertain particularly to women. One is that women eat, just as men do, and moreover that women eat in ways marked by form and practice in greater and lesser degrees. In other words, I presuppose that women in antiquity have meals. The question then becomes whether the ways in which women eat and the occasions of their eating share anything in common with the practices of men. For our purposes, this question can be focused in terms of whether the forms and occasions of women’s eating can contribute to an understanding of women as producers and transmitters of tradition.

Furthermore, following the recent work of Carolyn Osiek and Margaret MacDonald, I assume that, in their words, “women participated in all the activities of the house church in the first generations of the Christian era and that the house church was the center for worship, hospitality, patronage, education, communication, social services, evangelization, and mission.”⁴ This assumption may not be without dispute, but it shifts the burden of proof to the case of the absence of women from the activities of the house church. My final working presupposition is a corollary of this assumption, namely that simply because women are not mentioned in a text, it does not mean that they were absent from the real practices informing the text. Rather, the various levels of ideology with regard to social practice in general and meal practice in particular may function to erase mention of women where there is nothing marked about their presence. The work of Kathleen Corley and others has highlighted the ways in which the transgressive aspects of women’s presence at meals are what cause them ideologically to be marked.⁵ It is my hope to bring to the foreground the textual marking of women as performers in ways that are not necessarily transgressive, in order to show the remembrance of women in the practices of communal memory.

Remembering Women

The phrase “remembering women,” that is, “women who remember” emphasizes women as subjects in the practices of remembering, women as the producers and transmitters of traditions. It is hardly necessary to point out that this is one of the many areas in which the texts of early Christianity, as elsewhere in the Greco-Roman world, are largely silent. We may particularly note, however, the apparent silence concerning women as the “tellers” of traditions about Jesus in the context of the meal. Nevertheless, we may draw out a set of indications that suggest the possibility of just such a role for women in early Christian meal practice. In doing so, I am implicitly building on the work that others have done in recovering and reconstructing the activity and voices of women in the texts.⁶ The four “moments” of “remembering women” that I propose here are the following: (a) women as bearers of narrative in the gospel tradition; (b) the possibility of women as producers of tradition in a meal context in Luke 24; (c) traditions of lament and Greco-Roman funerary meals; and (d) the singing of women at the meal among the *Therapeutae*.

Women as Bearers of Narrative in the Gospel Tradition

An orientation to questions of religious practice in the gospel tradition suggests that we read the accounts less in terms of what really happened around Jesus and far more for what they refract of the community practices of the time of their writing.⁷ In this regard, the ways in which women are figured as tellers of a story about Jesus provide a starting point for thinking about women as active producers of a community’s memory. Chief among these moments in the canonical gospels are the accounts of the women at the empty tomb, where the action of women as those who tell others about Jesus’ resurrection is emphasized. Matthew 28:10 and John 20:18 are the most straightforward in that they do not problematize the women as the bearers of the news of the resurrection. It has been argued, moreover, that the role of Mary Magdalene in John 20 should be connected to Jesus-traditions legitimated through the apostolic authority of Mary Magdalene.⁸ For our present purposes, the question of origins is not of primary importance, but rather that in these passages we find indications of women as the bearers of a tradition about Jesus, and indeed women as the authorizing figures for a particular trajectory of remembering Jesus. Luke 24:11 gives evidence of conflict around the authenticity of the women’s account, both with its mention of the disbelief of those whom they told and the indication that the disbelief was because they thought it was “an idle tale” (*λῆρος*). Read into the Lukan world, this characterization may in fact be a stronger indication

that women are active as those who remember inasmuch as this note signals such activity as a point of contention.

A more complex question is that of women's activity as disciples in the Gospel of Mark. Noting Mark's use of *διακονέω* ("serve") and *ἀκολουθεῖω* ("follow") with reference to the women around Jesus (Mark 15:40–41), Corley argues that these terms bring out the "undertones" of conceptualizing the women as slave women, in faintly scandalous relationship to Jesus. She concludes, however, that these themes are subsumed within Mark's larger theological interests.⁹ I would suggest instead that the women around Jesus in the Gospel of Mark are portrayed as the ideal disciples, unswerving and able to receive the cross; their presence in household scenes throughout the Gospel is not, *pace* Corley, a matter of containing them within the private arena but rather placing them in the locale where Jesus communicates directly and intimately (cf. Mark 4:19, 31–35). The women are thus configured as the performers of true discipleship, those who reenact the "cross" through their actions. This feature may provide a clue to the enigmatic silence of the women at the end of Mark's Gospel, "[the women] said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid" (Mark 16:8). In the context of performance, this conclusion is contradicted by the fact of the telling, suggesting indeed that the women were successful as bearers of the tradition after all. In conjunction with a configuration of women as those who reenact the cross by their discipleship, this portrayal points to the importance of women in the Markan community as the transmitters of a story of Jesus' death and vindication.¹⁰

Luke 24 and Women as the Producers of Tradition

On the principle that women may be present in the text even when they are not specifically named or noted, I turn now to the Emmaus story in Luke 24. I venture here a speculative but possible reading in view of the observation that the narrative appears highly indicative of community practice. That is, although the story shows many signs of careful narrative crafting characteristic of Luke's literary style, it nonetheless narrates the process of mimesis central to the development of a story of Jesus' death in cultic context. It narrates the interaction of scriptural interpretation and ritual action in the context of the meal, with Jesus portrayed as the authoritative initiator and interpreter of the cultic reenactment.¹¹ Here the meal becomes the generative matrix of the process of remembrance. It is thus important to inquire into the role of women as participants, even transmitters, in that process of reenactment and remembrance.

I note accordingly that of the two disciples traveling to Emmaus only one is named and thus identifiable as male (Cleopas; Luke 22:19). The other

remains both nameless and without gender, which opens up the possibility that this disciple is a woman. The reference in Luke 24:22 to the report of “some women of our group” does not preclude the possibility that this unnamed disciple is another woman, and simply not one of those who went to the tomb (Luke 24:10). The return of these two to Jerusalem, after “recognizing” Jesus in the meal, places them among “the eleven and those with them” (Luke 24:33); similarly here the general terms do not preclude the presence of women among the group with the 11. This possibility is important because this larger group likewise experiences the “recognition” of Jesus through the meal (in this case a meal of broiled fish, Luke 22:36–43) and the interpretation of the scriptures of Israel (Luke 24:44–48). Although we cannot be certain of women’s participation in these meals, it is nonetheless plausible that Luke’s account encompasses their activity as those who are bearers and transmitters of stories of Jesus’ death and resurrection in the context of the meal. We might build a similar case for 1 Corinthians 10–11, namely that the conjunction of women (however it is problematized in the letter) as leaders in the Corinthian community and the reflection on Jesus’ death in cultic reenactment of the scriptures of Israel in the context of the meal makes plausible the case that in Corinth women too were those who transmitted early traditions of Jesus’ passion.

Laments and Funerary Meals

The prominence of women at the tomb in the gospel traditions as those who have an authoritative utterance to narrate indicates a fruitful line of inquiry for thinking about women as producers and transmitters of tradition, namely the practices of lamentation in conjunction with funerary meals as generative of narrative performance. As Angela Standhartinger has also pointed out in the preceding essay,¹² the ritual lament uttered by women becomes the medium of remembering the dead in ancient and Modern Greek tradition.¹³ The poetics of the lament, as also the poetics of grave inscriptions,¹⁴ frequently function in such a way that the performer takes on the voice of the dead: the identity of one who remembers merges with the one who is remembered; the one remembered overtakes the voice of the one who remembers, so that the voice of singer and the dead become interchangeable.¹⁵

In this connection we may add to the accounts of the empty tomb in the gospels the story of Martha and Mary at the tomb of Lazarus in John 11. Of great importance here is not only the role of these two women as mourners, but also the way in which the evangelist takes up their presence, particularly that of Martha, as a narrative site for developing theological dialogue concerning the resurrection (John 11:22–27) That is, the exchange between Martha and Jesus, like the other dialogues throughout the Gospel

of John, is indicative of the activity of the Johannine community as carriers and shapers of the Jesus tradition through the genre of theological dialogue. It is also notable that the dialogue results in one of the highest Christological affirmations in the Fourth Gospel, and it comes out of the mouth of Mary: “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world” (John 11:27). For our purposes, I highlight here the way in which a story about the practices of lamentation becomes the occasion for the presentation of performance. The possibility of conceptualizing such practices in this way may suggest that lamentation functioned as a matrix of community memory for the development of the Jesus tradition.

The interrelation of practices of lament with the practices of funerary meals in Hellenistic and Roman culture requires far more investigation, particularly with regard to women as performers in the context of such meals. The importance of funerary meals, burial associations, lamentation at the grave in relation to “eating with the dead,” and the prominence of the authoritative utterances of women in such community practices should all be taken together. It is particularly significant that the poetics of such practices allow for women’s voices as the medium for the presence of the dead in relation to the meal of remembrance. It may also point toward understanding aspects of women’s “prophecy” in early Christianity as a dimension of how women bear a community’s memory.

Women as Singers in the Context of the Meal: The Case of the Therapeutae

The composition and singing of hymns (individual and choral) at the festal meals of the Therapeutae, as depicted in ideal terms by Philo in *On the Contemplative Life* (11.80–88), provides another example. Philo not only portrays the meals of this community in terms of the symposium, but he also highlights the performance of song after the eating is complete. He does so, moreover, in terms that portray such song traditions as a dimension of the performative reenactment of scriptural hymnody, which thus suggests that Philo may have understood the meal as an occasion for the composition-in-performance of song. I emphasize here the presence of women as participants in these performances: they, along with the men, sing in the context of the meal (“after the feast,” 11.83). The antiphonal alternation of a women’s chorus with a men’s chorus raises provides a further example of women those participating in a community’s practices of reenactment and remembrance. In this instance, there are no indications of practices of lamentation, rather of ecstatic praise; both, however, as examples of authoritative speech-acts in song, may demonstrate the activity of women as performers in the context of the meal.¹⁶

Remembered Women

In this section I take up the question of the modalities by which women are remembered in the context of the meal. I ask what it is that various traditions “remember” around the figure of the woman at the meal and thus what cultural work the figure of the woman is doing within a particular text. I do not want to dismiss from the larger picture consideration of the socially transgressive dimensions of how women are remembered in relation to the meal, which Corley’s work highlights. I wish instead to set these aspects to one side for the time being in order to ask a different set of questions. I ask whether we can perceive any signs that the way in which women are remembered in stories about meals can help us understand women as the bearers of communal memory and tradition in relation to meal practice. I focus on three particular instances: (a) the woman who anoints Jesus in Mark 14:3–9; (b) Livy’s account of Lucretia in his history of Rome; and (c) the exemplary and problematic behavior of women at meals in the Roman ideology of the symposium.

Mark 14:3–9

As was the case with the gospel traditions explored above, I take this story not as a vignette about an event in Jesus’ life but rather as displaying the values and practices important to Mark and a Markan community. The concluding saying, “Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her” (Mark 14:9) not only grounds the story in the ongoing tradition (*anamnēsis*) of the community related to this Gospel, but also immediately raises the question of what action it is that is “told in remembrance.” With the context of the meal in mind, we may ask if this woman is to be remembered because she has in some fashion transgressed the social norms of the meal, whether by her very presence as a woman or by her extravagant gesture of anointing Jesus, which highlights a conflict over economic values. I would suggest that these are subthemes in the story and that the story itself emphasizes a different reason why she is to be remembered. Jesus’ statement that she has “anointed” his “body beforehand for burial” (Mark 14:8) connects the woman’s action to funerary practices and lamentation. In other words, what is to be remembered is her prophetic performance, displaying her understanding—in terms of the values of Mark’s Gospel—of the character of Jesus’ mission. Like the prophets of Israel, she enacts her “word,” which is here performed in the act of anointing Jesus’ body for burial.

For our purposes, we may say that in the context of the meal narrated in Mark 14, the woman becomes the performance. Her action comprises the performance portion of the symposium. What is more, inasmuch as her act partakes of funerary practices, we may recognize that how she is remembered here is indicative of women's roles in rituals of lamentation and funerary meals. Although in Mark's story the woman is silent, her status as the performance at this meal may be seen as a refraction of the practices of women as more vocal performers in the authoritative laments connected with funerary meals. That is, how this woman is remembered points to her role as one engaged in the production and transmission of utterance in the meals of the death rituals.

Lucretia Remembered

For an example of a woman as a performer of social values in relation to the meal, I turn to the figure of Lucretia as she is remembered in Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita* (1.57–59.13). The structure of the narrative is that of a contest (at a drinking party) among the men as to the relative virtue of their wives. The “daughters-in-law of the king,” depicted as the antithesis to Lucretia, are discovered at a “luxurious banquet” (*in convivio luxuque*) with their friends, when their husbands arrive unexpectedly. Lucretia, in contrast, is found in the “hall of her house” spinning and weaving with her female servants; when her husband arrives with his friends, she “receives” them, whereupon her husband invites them to his table. This rather proper act of hospitality, however, becomes the occasion for Sextus Tarquinius to conceive of the idea of raping Lucretia. Her resultant suicide, out of her shame, further underscores the height of her virtue. Livy tells this story as part of his account of the liberation of Rome from tyranny and of the triumph of the Republic. The “freedom of Rome” is thus correlated closely with the virtue of Lucretia; the avenging of her death is what liberates Rome.

This story is a rather different way of remembering a woman in relation to meal practices from those we have considered above, but I suggest that in Livy's account Lucretia similarly becomes a performance. In her case, she “performs” the values and virtues foundational to the Roman Republic. Her story is, moreover, an act of memorial, a way of lamenting her death and yet upholding her ongoing significance for the society.¹⁷ The centrality of the meal to structure value (virtue and vice) in the story provides, in my view, another indication of practices of memorial intersecting with meal practices. The question that I would pose here is whether we can connect such narrative remembrances of women as performances in meals, on the one hand,

to women themselves as performers of acts of memorial in some types of symposia, on the other.

What Manner of Symposium?

In the ideology of the symposium, much of the attention to the presence of women focuses on the transgressive rather than the normative. In other words, under the axiom that “women are good to think with,” we hear about women in the symposium when it is desirable to emphasize the frivolous, extravagant, erotic, or entertaining. The women in these contexts are accordingly figured typically as the courtesan, the “flute-girl,” the foreigner (or one who adopts “foreign” customs), or the potential adulteress (the potentially available wife of another man). If the symposium is the model for the formal meal or banquet, including philosophical, religious, and funerary meals, then we do not assume that such frivolity, sexuality, or extravagance in entertainment is the norm for the symposium. Similarly we should inquire into how we might think of “serious” women present at “serious” meals. (I intend “serious” not as the opposite of “frivolous” but rather to designate the unmarked member of the pair, the “default,” as it were, in contrast to which the frivolous, extravagant, or erotic symposium is the marked form, emphasized as such in the ideology of the symposium.¹⁸) To put it another way, it seems to me that the ideology of the symposium remembers women as either exemplary or transgressive, but that it does so not only with regard to women’s behavior but also to communicate social values for all.

There are sufficient indications among Roman authors that, at least for the elite, the presence of the women of the household at the formal meal was unremarkable. Achilles Tatius (1.5) depicts the arrangement of a home dinner party—an occasion for great flirtation—at which mothers and daughters were present along with father and son. Tacitus (*Ann.* 13.16), although depicting a rather unusual dinner at which Britannicus was assassinated, nonetheless includes Agrippina and Octavia without seeming to remark on their gender as an element in the meal. Plutarch’s account of the *Dinner of the Seven Wise Men* (150d) links modesty in food and wine at the symposium with the modest attire of the host’s wife at the dinner. Similarly, in *On Love of Wealth*, Plutarch depicts the “everyday” dinner-party of the wealthy man, dining with his wife or comrades (συνήθου), as matching the toned-down luxury of the furnishings with his wife’s modest dress. Σωφροσύνη (“moderation, soundness of mind, discretion”) is accordingly a virtue appropriate to both man and woman at the meal (528b). In *Advice to Bride and Groom*, Plutarch also commends the practice of husband and wife dining together as cultivating socially appropriate habits with regard to both food

and company, “Men who do not like to see their wives eat in their company are thus teaching them to stuff themselves when alone. So those who are not cheerful in the company of their wives, nor join with them in sportiveness and laughter, are thus teaching them to seek their own pleasures apart from their husbands” (140a, LCL trans.). In assessing these passages, I do not oppose the symposium to other kinds of meals. Rather if the symposium provides a model for understanding communal meal practice in antiquity, then the more ordinary meal of a husband and wife at home (with family and/or friends) may partake of the same structure and conventions, albeit on a more moderate scale.

My point in this section is that it is possible for Roman authors to use the presence of women at meals either as unremarkable or to speak of the values of moderation and *σωφροσύνη*. That is, in the ideology of the meal women may be configured as bearers of exemplary values. Within this ideology, such a way of remembering women may occupy a less prominent place than the conceptualization of the transgressive behavior of women used to demarcate a problematic set of symposium practices. This more “serious” way of configuring women’s presence at the symposium may, however, be more indicative of the everyday ways in which women shared in meals. We need therefore to find good ways to negotiate the space between the ideology of the symposium and the lived practices. Doing so is particularly important for the question of women’s performance at the meal. If the model of women’s performance in the meal is as an entertainer (as with the courtesan or flute-girl), then this model may obscure women’s participation in philosophical conversation or as the producers of poetic or narrative traditions.

A link between philosophy and a (serious) women’s presence at the meal and in the symposium proper may be evident as Plutarch takes up, in *Table-Talk*, the question “Whether philosophy is a fitting topic for conversation at a drinking party” (612e). In the course of the discussion the practices of the Persians, the quintessential other, are cited as commended by those who would exclude philosophy from the symposium. Clearly this is the position to be denounced. In place of philosophy, music and theatricals (*μουσική, ὑποκριτή*) are substituted. Persian practice in the symposium (aligned with the absence of philosophy and the presence of frivolity) is to associate with women other than their wives. What is striking, however, is that the exclusion of philosophy from the symposium is connected to the exclusion of the “matron of the house” (*οἰκοδέσποινα*) from the symposium. “The pretext they [the opponents of philosophy] very solemnly employ is that philosophy should no more have a part in conversation over wine than should the matron of the house” (613a). One way of reading this passage is to assume that the woman of house is not to be present at the symposium, that in the

comparison this absence is the “norm” upon which the opponents rely to make their case. I would propose a different reading, however, based on the coordinated example of the Persians, namely a “proper Greek” includes both philosophy *and* the woman of the house at the symposium, whereas the “improper Persian” excludes both philosophy and his wife from the symposium. Although we cannot on this reading make the case for the women as “serious” performers at the symposium, it nonetheless goes a step toward establishing women’s presence as participants in the full set of meal practices.

If it is possible to remember women as present and as participants in both what, for lack of a better pair of terms, I am calling here “frivolous” and “serious” symposia, then an appropriate avenue for investigation is where we might locate the variety of early Christian meals along this spectrum. Does the choice of foodstuffs, following Andrew McGowan’s work,¹⁹ align with other values with the result that, on many occasions, women are unremarkably participants in moderate, *σώφρων*, and philosophically inclined meals? Does women’s participation in such symposiastic conversation make them “performers” of philosophical theology (e.g., John 11)? Does the prominence of performance traditions to do with the lamentation of the dead and their presence through the medium of song and narrative itself signal far more serious meals than are emphasized in the ideology of the symposium? What might be said about wedding meals as typological for an understanding of early Christian rituals configured as a ritual of the marriage chamber (as among the Valentinians)? How are women’s wedding song traditions reshaped by women performers in ritual contexts that draw on the metaphor of marriage?

Moreover, if we maintain the model of the symposium for occasions when women gather to eat and to perform, then we should ask whether there are other ways in which these practices intersect with or run parallel to those of men. In the approaches that I have proposed in this essay I have tried to think in the first place of women and men participating together in the symposium and then to glean some evidence of this interaction. It may be, however, more productive to consider, at least for some occasions, models of separate but equivalent and parallel meal practices. I would suggest two possibilities, each respecting the coordinated components of *deipnon* and *symposium* proper.

The first possibility is that women and men eat together, but then separate for the *symposium*, with the result being two separate gatherings based on gender for the latter portion. The question then arises what women do in their *symposium*; even if they are primarily occupied with wool-working (as some texts indicate), then we should ask about performance traditions connected with such gatherings. (Material from other times and cultures

is suggestive of the association of spinning or weaving with extensive song traditions among women.²⁰)

A second possibility is that the separate but equivalent model pertains to both the *deipnon* and the *symposium*. In other words, women and men gather for eating and performance, even on the same occasions, but do so separately. There are some indications of this model among ancient writings, particularly in reference to wedding banquets (see Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 14.644d) and imperial dinner parties (Dio Cassius 57.12.5). As with the previous model, we need to explore what women's performance in such gatherings may have consisted of. I would suggest, however, that within all of these models the performance traditions around remembering Jesus can reasonably take place through the mouths of women. Moreover, the traditions of how women are themselves remembered as performers and performances in the meal, even when as in the case of Mark 14 the woman is present with men, may nonetheless describe the actual practices of women performers in contexts that are exclusive to women, but nonetheless known to men. That is, the narrative may not preserve the separation of gender in practice, but rather express in a single event the practice as belonging to the community as a whole, but actively practiced by only one segment.

To conclude, my goal has been to try to make some headway in recovering the activity of women as performers in the context of meal practices, to see meals as a generative matrix for women's production and transmission of tradition. In addition to the indications of women as those who do the work of remembering, perhaps particularly in the context of funerary practices, I have also attended to the way in which women themselves are remembered as performances of cultural values. The provocative and somewhat speculative move that I make, on the basis of approaches to the poetics of traditional performance, is to link the remembrance of women as performances ("heroes") with the activity of women as performers ("poets"). The dynamics of performance are capable of merging the hero and the poet, so that, in some instances, the poet takes on the voice of the hero and, in others, the hero is configured a poet. Along these lines I propose that how women are remembered in early Christian tradition helps us to understand their role as those who remember, that is, as the producers and transmitters of authoritative speech acts and narratives within the context of early Christian meals.

Notes

1. Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft*; Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*.
2. Aitken, *Jesus' Death in Early Christian Memory*, 27–54.

3. Martin, *The Language of Heroes*. I have previously explored this aspect of the poetics of transmission with reference to Jesus in the Gospel of Luke and in Hebrews; Aitken, "Tradition in the Mouth of the Hero."
4. Osiek and MacDonald, *A Woman's Place*, 9.
5. Corley, *Private Women, Public Meals*.
6. My work is here informed principally by Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*; Brootten, *Women Leaders*; King, *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala*; Antoinette Clark Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets*; Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, *Mark as Story*; Kittredge, *Community and Authority*; Karen Jo Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests*; and Brock, *Mary Magdalene, The First Apostle*.
7. This is also one of Kathleen Corley's methodological presuppositions in tracing evidence of social conflict through the accounts of women at meals in the synoptic tradition (*Private Women, Public Meals*).
8. King, *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala*; Brock, *Mary Magdalene, The First Apostle*.
9. Corley, *Private Women, Public Meals*, 83–107.
10. See Dewey, *Markan Public Debate*; and Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel*.
11. See Aitken, *Jesus' Death in Early Christian Memory*, 166–67.
12. Standhartinger, "Women in Early Christian Meal Gatherings."
13. Here I rely chiefly on the foundational work of Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition*, and Danforth, *The Death Rituals of Rural Greece*.
14. See Svenbro, *Phrasikleia*, 26–43.
15. See also Martin, *The Language of Heroes*, xiv; Nagy, "The Sign of the Hero," xxxi–xxxv.
16. See also Harvey, "Revisiting the Daughters of the Covenant," on traditions of women's choirs in late antique Syrian churches in relation to the eucharistic assembly.
17. Nicole Loraux argues for an analogous link between civic values and memorial in funeral orations in classical Athens; see Loraux, *The Invention of Athens*.
18. I derive the terminology of marked and unmarked from the linguistic theories of the Russian formalists, such as Roman Jakobson; see, for example, Jakobson, *Word*, 136.
19. McGowan, *Ascetic Eucharists*.
20. See Ferrari, *Figures of Speech*, 11–86.

CHAPTER 8

Present and Absent: Women at Greco-Roman Wedding Meals¹

Susan Marks

Although our focus on Greco-Roman meals leads us inevitably to the dining room, we begin this particular journey in another place. The three narratives that follow remind us that when considering early Jewish and Christian wedding meals we need to consider the bridal chamber as well. First from Tobit, as Sarah, the bride, awaits her eighth groom, having already lost seven grooms to a demon:

Raguel called his wife Edna and said to her “Sister, get the other room ready and take her there.” So she went and made the bed in the room as he told her and brought Sarah there. She wept for her daughter. Then wiping away tears she said to her, “Take courage, my daughter; the Lord of heaven grant you joy in place of your sorrow. Take courage, my daughter.” Then she went out. When they had finished eating and drinking they wanted to retire; so they took the young man and brought him into the bedroom.²

Edna settles her daughter then leaves the wedding chamber. Does she join the feast? It is hard to say. In the apocryphal *Acts of Thomas* the bride and the groom already occupy the wedding chamber when the king comes to the apostle:

“Arise and come with me, and pray for my daughter! For she is my only child, and today I give her in marriage.” But the apostle would not go

with him, for the Lord was not yet revealed to him there. But the king led him away against his will into the wedding chamber, that he might pray for them (the bridal pair) . . . And after laying his hand upon them and saying: “The Lord shall be with you,” he left them in that place and departed. The king required the attendants to go out of the bridal chamber. And when all had gone out and the doors were shut, the bridegroom lifted up the veil of the wedding chamber that he might bring the bride to himself. And he saw the Lord Jesus in the likeness of the apostle Judas Thomas, who shortly before had blessed them and departed from them, conversing with the bride, and he said to him: “Did you not go out before them all? How are you now found here?”³

The king has led Thomas from the feast (which we will explore in more detail later). We see a Houdini-like scene, which assures us that all doors are closed before Jesus-Thomas enters in a supernatural fashion interrupting the privacy of the bride and groom. And finally, the rabbis in the Babylonian Talmud discuss a hypothetical autumnal wedding that overlaps with the Feast of Booths, *Sukkot*, thus complicating the placement of feasting space and wedding chamber:

R. Abba b. Zabda also said in the name of Rab, A bridegroom and the attendants and all the wedding guests are free from the obligation of the *Sukkah* all the seven days [of wedding festivities.]

- What is the reason?
- Because they have to rejoice.
- But let them eat in the *Sukkah* and rejoice under the *huppah*?
- There can be no real rejoicing except where the banquet is held.
- But why should they not put up a *huppah* in the *Sukkah*?

Abaye says, [This is impossible] because of [the need for] privacy . . .⁴

The rabbis allude to the need for privacy and thereby the sexual activity of bride and groom in the *huppah* or wedding chamber.⁵ This becomes even clearer when we consider the sexual connotations of the word “rejoice.”⁶ Nevertheless, although the rabbis discuss the relationship of the *huppah* and feast, and *where* the feast should occur, they don’t tell us exactly who joins the feast or the order of events and thus when the privacy begins.

Each of the three narratives or discussions above reveals wedding chambers that are intensely connected to the feast. Moreover, as we look toward these wedding chambers we see our first glimpse of women at Greco-Roman weddings. In contrast to some other Greco-Roman meals, however, we cannot even begin to consider wedding feasts without recognizing the presence

of at least one woman, the bride, who at the very least remains “present” in the imagination of those celebrating, whether or not she attends the feast.

As we ask about whether the bride makes an appearance in the banquetting room, and also about what other female guests might be present, each of these episodes reminds us vividly that some of the action at a wedding feast takes place beyond the banquetting room. Leave it to a demon or a magical apostle to provide instant excitement, but there is also a certain drama in speculating about how much privacy a copulating bride and groom require. While we might imagine that the overshadowing presence of the wedding chamber and the charged sexuality might have kept women from attending such communal feasts; in fact, we catch glimpses of many women in and around wedding meals.

Interpreting the Evidence

Originally I had seen the evidence for wild weddings and assumed that these wild circumstances would have posed more danger to women than men in Greco-Roman cultures that protected “their” women, and I thus assumed it less likely that women participated. In doing so I had made unjustified assumptions about the nature of this threat. Moreover, one sees that in addition to erotic energy, other excitement and communal importance also accrues to weddings, thus challenging the attempts to exclude large portions of the community. Others have recognized the wedding banquet as a place of “sexual tension,”⁷ but the balance of danger and possibility deserves more examination. Consideration of the question of whether and how women participated at these feasts forces us to ask how much weight to give portrayals of feasting women as scandalous; likewise, how much weight to give the gestures toward inclusion; and finally how to fathom the vast invisibility of women within the sources.

Elsewhere in this volume Angela Standhartinger asks whether the appearance of women in meal narratives necessarily pointed to real women. These questions about women at meals also depend on the work of so many others.⁸ Nevertheless, the “constructedness” of gender has other implications as well. We can conceive of literary constructions of gender not only to explain the presentation of “women” in narratives, where doubt remains as to the likelihood of flesh and blood women making an appearance, but we can also consider *in what manner* “real” women might have ventured into the wedding festivities. In other words, as we look closely at whether women entered these banquetting spaces, we must also consider *how* women would have occupied these spaces, and, further, how these spaces contributed to the understanding or “construction” of those women who did so.

As I move from questions of “were the bride and other women at the feast?” to “*how* were the bride and other women at the feast?” I am also indebted to the recent work of Maxine Grossman and Cynthia Baker. Grossman takes an approach based on the reader-response studies of Stanley Fish, as she addresses questions of inclusion. In considering evidence for women in the Dead Sea, she reminds us how much leeway the reading/interpreting community has. She explains that whether we view the community of the Damascus Document as including or excluding women depends entirely on which of the surrounding texts we let guide us.⁹

Baker helps us see how the construction of women interacts with the habits and actions of women. In examining archeological and textual evidence for women in the third-century Galilee, she challenges earlier assumptions about the seclusion of women, and the very nature of public versus private, concluding that there is no evidence that Jewish women were secluded.¹⁰ She uses ideas of gaze and habit from Foucault and Bourdieu to argue that seclusion would have been redundant insofar as all evidence leads us to understand the enforced ways that women would have carried themselves, thus announcing their status and separation without the need of a physical barrier.¹¹ According to Baker, the actions and carriage of women defined the spaces in which they moved, rather than explicit inclusion or exclusion. A similar study of Roman houses explains that “male and female . . . inhabit the same spaces” where they are “separated by social rituals rather than physical environment.”¹² These representations of ancient houses prod me to reconsider the gendering work done by weddings and the implications for feasting rooms and bridal chambers. As we shall see, the acts of bathing, dressing, and processing with the bride all constitute highly gendered practice. Therefore, the women who approach wedding feasts could not have been confused with their male counterparts.

The work of both of these authors suggests the need to rethink some working assumptions about women and weddings, particularly the conviction that if women are not particularly mentioned then they were not there. With Grossman we will look at intertexts before interpreting presence or absence. With Baker, we will consider the actions that we do see on the edges of this silence. In the words of Carolyn Osiek and Margaret MacDonald, the social invisibility of women “may bear no resemblance to what was really going on.”¹³ The lack of visible women need not mean that women were excluded from weddings, regardless of the potential for wildness at these events.

The Nature of Wedding Feasts

In the account above, demon, apostle, and voyeuristic imagination all disrupt objectivity. While these constitute extreme cases I have yet to encounter

a wedding narrative that appears particularly concerned with verisimilitude. You will understand why this is if you ask yourself about weddings that you have attended. Likely you found some element inspiring, troubling, or in some other way electric, even if there was no recognizable demon. Would your written account help a later historian understand how weddings work? Or would your reader find himself or herself caught up in unraveling familial and communal dynamics? In addition, because even the most “real” weddings belong so much to the imagination we also find that literary accounts of weddings shape historical weddings. We know this to be the case in modernity, as the wedding marches of Mendelssohn and Wagner have made their way from art to “reality” and back again many times. How can we expect this to be different in the ancient world? Most likely vase paintings do not provide a “documentary” source so much as an alternate artistic exploration.¹⁴ Moreover, we must worry about whether diverse sources can really provide a kind of check and balance in this instance. All of this means that we may look at accounts of weddings, but we may or may not see into weddings themselves.

In addition, I am well aware that in moving from Tobit in the second century BCE to *Acts of Thomas* in the fourth century CE to the Babylonian Talmud, redacted in the sixth century CE, I offer little in the way of reconstructing the weddings of a particular time and place. I recognize the likelihood of local differences, and of trends that develop or wane over decades and centuries. Nonetheless, I see the task of this essay as a prior task, that of asking which dynamics appear in a range of texts concerning ancient weddings that one might consider *before* asking about detailed historical possibilities based on particular wedding narratives in particular times and places. I have made some attempt to separate Greek, Roman, Christian, Jewish, as well as early from late, but the demand for comparison interferes with the ability to be consistent. Moreover, our sources likely point primarily to elite weddings. Slaves could not legally marry. If they nevertheless ritualized such unions, no sources remain to inform us. We may assume that the weddings of freed-persons followed similar patterns as those described in our sources, but in most instances we cannot know.

Moreover, as the three initial accounts above indicate, some of the most important actions at a wedding happen behind closed doors. Only Thomas/Jesus can walk through walls to enter the bridal chamber, while most guests may access it only with their imaginations. In other words, this study not only looks at ancient feasts, but also at the ancient reflections from *within* the banqueting chamber toward events that were out of sight to the majority of actual guest-participants as well as to us. We know that numerous feasts surrounded the wedding, so we must be careful to not prejudge the data.¹⁵ All our sources note the occurrence of another feast the following day.¹⁶

From preparations and invitations onward we learn of the importance of the feasting, but on some level the *procession* (occurring perhaps between feasts?), the seclusion of the bride and groom and the gift-giving shapes what would otherwise be seen as a “typical” feast. Significantly, among the numerous vase paintings that portray such detail as dressing the bride, making wedding cakes and processing, only one *calyx-krater* vase portrays the feast, and this one “feast” was the wedding of Perithous and Hippodameia, including intoxicated centaurs and an evening of mayhem and slaughter.¹⁷ In other words, no one doubts that weddings had feasts, but an artist depicting a “wedding” achieved his/her aim by depicting other scenes. These choices regarding “interesting” subjects necessarily impact our evidence for feasts. If feasts belonged in the midst of other wedding practices and thus often go unremarked, we need to take special care before assuming we can provide a detailed sketch of the parameters of this feasting, and that includes consideration of the gender of all participants.

Moreover, as Susan Treggiari explicitly reminds us, not all rites occur at each wedding.¹⁸ Roman variants would have included situations in which the entire set of feasts occurred at one house, since the *deduction*/procession between the homes of the bride and groom was not legally necessary.¹⁹ Thus, one might ask about the boundaries between one feast and another in this series of feasts. In the Greek and Roman practices described, did the guest invited to the home of the bride tend to appear the next day for the morning feast, even without a new invitation? Or put another way, did feasting really stop with the procession or simply move to a new location? I highlight these alternatives because the evidence for where we find women remains most ambiguous, in an already ambiguous setting. I will continue as I began with Tobit, *Acts of Thomas*, and Babylonian Talmud *Sukkot* and consider the possibility of simultaneous feasting and bridal chamber for the evidence it provides concerning gender. In acknowledging that we cannot always distinguish evidence for participants in the wedding and at the wedding feast, I nevertheless try to indicate when the evidence is more and less clear.

The Mention of Women at Wedding Feasts

If the question before us was not about women at feasts but was merely a question of the involvement of women with some aspect of weddings, there would be no question as to the inclusion of women. As in the case from Tobit, the bride may count on her mother and/or other women to prepare her for the occasion. The answer becomes murkier when narrowed to consider those who shared the wedding meal. Two kinds of evidence touch on this question: direct references to women and wedding celebrations, and

a silence concerning women that we will interpret in light of conflicting images of the bride and of the nature of weddings. Moving from the more clear-cut to the less, one does find reference to “women” in the same breath as reference to weddings guests. The importance of weddings as communal function becomes quickly apparent, as does the principle of inclusion. Howsoever they are included or excluded, women were aware of the weddings in their communities. Plutarch (1st c. CE) describes:

There is no occasion for a feast that is as conspicuous and much discussed as a wedding . . . a wedding feast is given away by the loud cries of the Hymenaios and the torch and the pipes, things that Homer says are admired and watched even by women who stand at their doors. Therefore since there is no one who is unaware that we are entertaining and have invited people, we are ashamed to leave out anyone, and we invite all of our relative and friends and connections of any type.²⁰

Since Plutarch mentions women in particular, it seems likely that they could have expected invitations, although note he also moves without compunction to the literary-historical example of Homer. Because of this we must allow for the possibility of change in practice regarding women from Homer’s time to that of Plutarch. Nevertheless, he emphasizes that all knew of the event because of the procession. If such a procession in fact followed, or at least some of the feasting, then the watching audience knew that they had not received invitations to this particular occasion. Plutarch seems to imply that the host should have taken care in the guest list lest he/she overlook someone, including presumably these watching women. Thus we receive the suggestion that women feasted at some weddings. In the following by Athenaeus (2nd c. CE), the presence of women guests appears even more plainly in instructions to servants concerning wedding preparations:

I told you to set up four tables for women and six for men. The feast must be perfect – don’t leave anything out.²¹

Women had been invited and would sit before their own tables. Were the tables for women in the same space as those for men? Dennis Smith and Kathleen Corley both cite Lucian (2nd c. CE) as an example of women (including the bride) sharing a couch (and thus a table?) with each other while apparently occupying the same room as the men.²² We do not know whether that is the only answer. In any case, the Athenaeus text tells of a significant number of women guests.

Two of fourteen extant papyri wedding invitations indicate that women sometimes hosted these occasions as well. Both invitations show mothers inviting guests to weddings of their children.²³ Likewise, a statement from Mishnah *Ketubbot* (3rd c. CE) emphasizes that married women had the right to take part at such communal events. It goes so far as to demand that a man must divorce his wife rather than prohibit her from all “houses of mourning and houses of (wedding) feasting.”²⁴ Here too there is no map to show where she spent her time once at the “house.” In addition, while the demand for divorce in cases where husbands excluded wives from attending argues for the assumption that women would be “invited,” it also suggests that there were husbands who sought to keep their wives away.

Thus, one finds enough examples to suggest that weddings included some women in some manner. Nevertheless, we also find moralizing depictions of negative behavior on the part of women at weddings. On the one hand, we might interpret these as warnings only and therefore distant from what actually happened. On the other hand, they might articulate real concern and practice with only the slightest exaggeration. For instance, Apuleius (2nd c. CE) offers a glimpse of the wedding banquet of the gods. At the wedding of Psyche, after she becomes immortal, males and females recline. The bride and groom have not yet departed into or have already returned from the wedding chamber: “Instantly there appeared a rich wedding-banquet. The bridegroom reclined on the couch of honour, clasping Psyche in his arms. Jupiter with his wife Juno were similarly placed, and then all the gods in order of rank.”²⁵ Framing this as a gathering of gods might serve as a caveat that human weddings are different.²⁶ Or, this portrait might articulate possible practice and related concerns.

This is not the only example of women reclining at weddings or of the overt sexual intimacy of the meal. Recently, Matthew Roller has argued for the normalcy of women reclining at Roman meals. Upon consideration of literary evidence, funerary monuments and wall paintings Roller concludes, contrary to the earlier received opinion, that reclining was standard practice for women.²⁷ Assumptions to the contrary have been based on funerary monuments that depict women seated on the couches on which their husbands recline. Roller argues that these belong to subelite Romans who wished to portray themselves as socially integrated into Roman society. Nevertheless, while they borrowed images of elite meal settings to show that they had “made” it, they also felt the need to accentuate the purity of their lineage.²⁸ Roller argues that elite families did not share these same constraints. He concludes that a woman reclining on a couch with a man indicates a licit relationship; she could be his wife, or a prostitute, but this act would not indicate an adulterous or forbidden relationship (*stuprum*).²⁹

He also suggests that the pleasures of the dining couch led seamlessly to the pleasures of the bedroom.³⁰ Roller thus argues that reclining was unexceptional, although men and women reclining together would have remained sexually charged.

Roller's argument has significant implications for wedding meals. First, it suggests that if in certain Roman contexts wives reclined regularly with husbands, then we would also expect this custom at wedding meals. In contrast, Treggiari, who wrote of Roman marriage and weddings, albeit before Roller, describes the instances of reclining as implying scandalous behavior, citing mock descriptions in Tacitus and Juvenal.³¹ In other words, like the feasting gods in Apuleius these could have been the examples of what should not take place. Treggiari suggests elsewhere that the women socialized separately at these wedding feasts.³² By contrast, Roller argues that "scandalous" literary examples work because they depend on the normal behavior. He cites the same Tacitus that Treggiari cites, describing Messalina and her adulterous lover in order to illustrate how "they co-opt and subvert" a "symbol of legitimacy."³³ Roller challenges us to revisit evidence for where and in what manner we find women at wedding feasts and for the posture and behavior of husbands and wives. At the very least, we see variations in the norm as suggested by segregated couches in Athenaeus and Lucian, and wives with husbands in Apuleius and Dio Cassius (discussed below).

The second area for exploration revealed by Roller concerns his presentation of pervasive sexuality at Roman meals. His focus on reclining and sexuality complicates my assumption that wedding meals generated a particularly intense eroticized atmosphere that would have aroused a particularly guarded concern. He forces me to reconsider whether the sexuality of weddings was unique. There seems no doubt that something of the aura of wedding attracts particular attention and the need for a text like the Mishnah to both flag it as a potential source of difficulty while at the same time assure the rights of wives to attend. Thus weddings may not have been the only wild meals, but wild behavior happens at them, nonetheless. Alternately, some, but not all descriptions of women guests at weddings appear in moralizing contexts. Like reclining, the act of "drinking" figures in mocking critiques of dining women. Such a moral tone certainly appears in Menander's (4th–3rd c. BCE) description that women at weddings might soak up wine "like sand."³⁴ In his interpretation of subelite funeral monuments Roller notes the absence of wine cups in the hands of banqueting women, suggesting care in avoiding the "transgressive overtones, of the woman who reclines and drinks wine with a man."³⁵ On the other hand, the wedding in Cana in the Gospel of John presents the mother of Jesus concerning herself with the emerging wine-shortage,³⁶ although the text does not suggest that she was

drinking too much. As in the case of reclining, we have no reason to believe that drinking was transgressive, only drinking too much.

The Bride and the Wedding Feast

Evidence for brides at wedding meals echoes evidence for wedding guests, only more so. In the case of guests, we encountered a great deal of silence and some occasional representations of moderate or scandalous female behavior. In the case of the bride, again we encounter a great deal of silence, in addition, we also find diametrically opposing characterizations of the bride. Not only do we wonder about the location of the bride, but also whether she represents light or darkness, the forces of good or the forces of evil. Concern with the bride crystallizes concern with the occasion. On some level the bride epitomizes both the possibility and the threat.

At early Greek weddings, the *epaulia*, or gift-giving feast, began at dawn when the bride and groom emerge from the wedding chamber.³⁷ One finds debate about whether this morning *epaulia* coincides with the *anakalypteria* (or unveiling) and thus also involved a gift from groom to bride.³⁸ Some scholars interpret this feast as where the community welcomes the bride as already “wife,” with a new status.³⁹ Another interpretation sees this feast as an occasion where the new family sees her stripped before their eyes.⁴⁰

A Roman example also demonstrates the ambivalent possibilities of a bride that signifies either union or contamination. The second marriage of Livia affords a most clear tableau of the bride at a wedding feast. Nevertheless, little of the wedding appears typical. There can be little doubt that we are meant to be shocked that the first husband of pregnant Livia stands in place of a father to “give her in marriage.” And when Livia reclines with Caesar, her new husband, a small slave boy of her household captures the confusion of the event, saying, “What are you doing here, mistress? For your husband [until today] is reclining over there?”⁴¹ Nevertheless, despite the strangeness of the moment, her reclining appears less at issue than the number of husbands in the room and thus with whom she ought to recline. The bride captures the attention of the assembled and embodies both threat and promise.

Brides appear remarkably absent in Christian accounts of wedding feasts. In *Acts of Thomas*, neither the bride nor the groom had a role at the feast. Cyprian (3rd c. CE) expresses concern that the bride at wedding parties “is animated to bear . . . lewdness.”⁴² He implies that her presence can only be an embarrassment. The first concerted attempts to Christianize weddings occur in Rome in the fourth century “in which the bishop placed a veil over the head of the bride and offered a nuptial blessing.”⁴³ Ambrose emphasizes

that such a practice should presume a shared faith, “Since it is necessary for the marriage itself to be sanctified by the veil and blessing by a priest, how is it possible to call this a ‘marriage’ when there is not an agreement in faith?”⁴⁴ Of course we do not know that this rite occurs at the feast, and this blessing may be no more “public” or visible than the celibacy-inspiring blessing of Thomas. Nevertheless, such an example stands amid vast silences.

Jewish texts also offer diametrically opposing glimpses of brides *vis-à-vis* wedding feasts. A talmudic narrative situates R. Akiba’s daughter, as bride, in the wedding chamber and *not* the feast experienced by others.⁴⁵ R. Akiba’s daughter is a “good” bride: it turns out that she saved herself from death by a self-less act of charity. Astrologers had told R. Akiba that “on the day [his daughter] enters the wedding chamber, a snake will bite her and she will die.”⁴⁶ The story appears as one of a series that illustrate how *charity delivers from death*, and this particular drama takes its audience into the wedding chamber, where she is disrobing:

On that day [of her marriage] she took a brooch [and] stuck it into the wall [of the *huppah*] and by chance it penetrated into the eye of a serpent. The following morning, when she took it out, the snake came trailing after it.

When her father later asks: “What did you do?,” meaning “what did you do that you escaped your fate?,” she replied: “A poor man came to our door in the evening”:

. . . and everybody was busy at the banquet, and there was no one to attend to him. So I took the portion which was given to me and gave it to him.

Thus she saves herself. It may also be surmised that the narrative depicting her naïve play with a “snake” in her wedding chamber marks her as a most innocent bride.⁴⁷ In any case, the narrative connects her with the wedding chamber. The bride explains that she was in a position to give charity because she was *not* “busy” with the feast. Either she was present at the periphery, or she ate her “portion” of the wedding feast elsewhere. She heard and responded to the door that went unnoticed by others “busy” with the feast.

In contrast to this presentation of a virtuous bride, minor tractate *Kallah* (3rd–8th c. CE) assumes the bride is present at the feast and the text opposes such a practice: “They asked R. Eliezer what a person who takes a cup from her during those seven days while her husband is sitting at the table with

her is like. He said to them, 'Anyone who drinks from the hand of a bride it is as if he drinks from the hand of a prostitute [*zonah*].'⁴⁸ In contrast to the narrative concerning the daughter of Akiba where the bride was not at the feast, but assumed virtuous, here the narrative assumes the bride poses a great threat. David Brodsky compares the version in *Kallah* with a variant in the Babylonian Talmud. In the talmudic version, two voices emerge rather than one. One voice (R. Yohanan) proves similar to R. Eliezer above. The other voice belongs to the disgruntled wife who expects to receive a cup. The talmudic account appears to favor the wife, nevertheless, there are other differences in that version, it may be then in that version she is not a recent bride.⁴⁹ These various accounts of brides and wedding feasts may suggest that the question of women at wedding meals and the bride in particular was in a state of flux. Such a virulent expression on the part of R. Eliezer, however, suggests that brides were sometimes present and that some authors worked to contest this presence.

A third voice, that of the Palestinian Talmud, dismisses any need for the bride to sit at the meal, and in fact dismisses her as an object, and her presence as symbolic. The quorum of feast participants requires the groom's presence since he may act in ways the bride cannot:

It has been taught: They say the grooms' blessing⁵⁰ all seven days. R. Jeremiah considered ruling that they bring the bride out all seven days. R. Yose said to him, "And lo, R. Hiyya taught: They say the blessing for the mourners every day for seven days." Now can you maintain that they bring the corpse out every day for seven days?⁵¹ Then what is the upshot of the matter? Just as, in the case of a death, one mourns with the mourner, so in the case of marriage, one rejoices with the groom. Just as in the former case, one makes mention, so in the latter case, one makes mention.⁵²

This text suggests that during the seven days of celebrating the wedding, the groom and community need only make mention of the bride in a similar manner as the community mentions the deceased during the seven days of mourning. This text uses the parallel between weddings and funerals to illustrate why the bride need only be brought out once for one procession at the beginning, although the groom has obligations to the community that do not cease for these seven days. It doesn't protest the bride's presence at the feast, rather it establishes the importance of the groom's communal function and dismisses the bride as irrelevant. Moreover, this dismissal also indicates awareness that the bride might undermine his communal role as adult male.

In these several accounts of brides and meals we begin to discern underlying concerns about communal behaviors such as modesty, charity, and ritual obligation, as well as the role that the bride plays in either undermining or supporting these. One does not need the physical presence of a bride in order for the bride to “present” these roles. In the previous example, it was enough to “make mention” of the bride, so too in the next example. The wedding blessings in the Babylonian Talmud construct the bride’s imaginary presence, whether or not she was present as these words were sung or recited. Like the Palestinian Talmud, the discussion of the wedding blessings in the Babylonian Talmud assumes that the groom must participate in the *minyan*.⁵³ But it also provides a text of a blessing that mentions the bride. The text asks rhetorically “What does one say?” It then continues with a string of six blessings. Of particular relevance is the blessing “who has created man in his image in the image of the likeness of his form and has prepared unto him out of himself a building for ever. Blessed are you, O Lord, creator of man.”⁵⁴ This blessing refers to the first bride and groom, Adam and Eve, and alludes to the “building” in Gen 2.22 in which God “fashioned the rib.” The blessing further explains that God created Eve as a helpmeet, or “building” (*banyan*) forever. Here we observe another aspect of the characterization of the bride as supportive.⁵⁵

With these broad strokes, the good bride and the bride enter the wedding festivities. Some voices see the presence of women at these events as worthy of being mocked, while others explicitly include women without such comment, suggesting that they too contribute to the occasion. We must heed this balance between scandalized and accepting voices because we have now considered most of the evidence that explicitly discusses women at weddings. We now must turn to the silences, and consider whether we can spot the presence or absence of women in the ungendered descriptions of weddings.

Listening for Silent Women

As mentioned above the one wedding feast portrayed on a Greek vase was the feast that included the centaurs and ended in disaster. Violence appears to be one face of weddings, and must figure into the equation of women and wedding meals. In the following descriptions we might wonder whether weddings served such an important communal function that, of course, women attended, or likewise, were so dangerous that women did not. This issue of potential and danger, whether embodied by the bride or standing alone, when interpreted together with the examples of women present at feasts helps us to fathom the silence, or rather to understand how, invisibly, ancient women navigated this challenge.

In both Plutarch and Mishnah *Ketubbot*, we encountered the notion that the women of the community would be eagerly following events surrounding a nearby wedding and anticipating invitations that would be broadly inclusive. We encounter a number of texts that emphasize the inclusiveness of weddings, but they don't articulate the particulars. One type of ambivalent evidence is theological. Jewish and Christian circles concerned themselves with considerations of sacred marriage, whether that of God and Israel or of Jesus and the Church, while simultaneously guarding this sacrality against more human coupling.⁵⁶ These allegorical concerns may thus have had little or much to do with the weddings of human beings, depending on their success in separating aspects fitting for divine marriage from actual weddings.

We thus find ourselves in the challenging situation of looking at theological/ideological texts for evidence of prior communal practice, even while we recognize that theologians maintained a distance from communal practice. In other words, they ask that the association only work one way. Human events may be allegorized, but care must be taken not to irreverently invoke the idea of celestial union. Nonetheless, in this appropriation of images we may assume that appeals to human practice had some (however minor) claim to reality or they would not function well as allegories. Thus we may learn something from a wedding invitation in the Gospel of Matthew that aims broadly to include. In Matthew, Jesus presents the parable of a king, who, despairing of hearing from his initial wedding guests, "said to his slaves, 'The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore into the main streets, and invite *everyone* you find to the wedding banquet.'"⁵⁷ This parable provides a fine example of a claim of "inclusiveness," but with no details. In some cases it would be reasonable to interpret this masculine plural accusative pronoun as including women, in other cases not.⁵⁸ We get no help from the later verse in this section of Matthew in which the king observes a "man there who was not wearing a wedding robe."⁵⁹ We cannot know whether this suggests that all the women were well dressed and escaped such negative attention; or, alternately that they were not present.

We find similar ambiguity in the *Acts of Thomas*, which appears intentionally to echo the mandatory wedding invitation in Matthew.⁶⁰ Should we read it as significant that the lists do not include "male and female"? Or rather, would the community have known that of course women would come to the wedding, and that the surprise in this passage would have been "poor," "bond," and "strangers"? If we use Plutarch or Mishnah *Ketubbot* as an intertext, women would have expected invitations.

In addition to these explicit, albeit ungendered, claims of inclusion, one finds a number of texts that emphasize the communal importance of weddings, and suggest the importance of being part of the festivities. One such

aspect was the display of gifts and wealth previously mentioned. Regardless of debates concerning the timing of the *anakalypteria*, all assume the bride's presence for the *epaulia*/gift-giving. The costly gifts and ceremonies command communal attention for much of the day. And one might also observe gifts *to* the community, or acts of philanthropy on the occasion of the wedding. A mosaic synagogue inscription (third–fifth century CE) describes a contribution to the building that was promised at a wedding dinner.⁶¹ The inscription records both the vow and the occasion. The feast of the wedding is noteworthy for its importance to communal happenings. Elsewhere, a parable that appears in rabbinic accounts⁶² and in fragmentary form in the *Apocryphon of Ezekiel* also shows the communal importance of a feast.⁶³ The story tells of a lame man and a blind man who seek revenge because they were not invited to the banquet celebrating the wedding of the king's son. Note that the general inclusiveness did not encompass this blind one or lame one. We thus see the limits of inclusion we wondered about in the case of women. The adventures of the blind man and lame man relate to the feast, which provides the site of their exclusion. The public forum captures their attention. That this story appears in both Christian and Jewish accounts and displays a somewhat ambiguous origin, only serves to underscore shared communal concerns around feasts.

Another indication of the importance of the feast appears in the growing anxiety found in the Babylonian Talmud regarding the wedding feasts of neighboring communities. Christine Hayes has examined talmudic prohibitions about Jews attending the wedding feasts of gentiles. She argues that amoraic rabbis grew stricter in prohibiting Jews from attending such feasts, extending earlier prohibitions so that they included the acceptance of the invitation of a gentile rather than just the consumption of gentile food:

Surely this applies only when there is actual consumption [and not just acceptance of the invitation]?

Rava said, "If so, the verse would have said only 'and you will eat of his sacrifice.' Why then does it say 'and invite you?' (Ex 34.15). This extends the prohibition to the time of his attendance (generally)."

Thus, all 30 days [of the feast celebration], whether or not it is mentioned that the feast is connected with the wedding, it is forbidden. From then on, however, if it is stated that it is connected with the wedding, it is forbidden, while if connection with the wedding is not stated, it is permitted.⁶⁴

Hayes emphasizes that these rulings display a remarkable stringency even though older theories lead one to expect a leniency,⁶⁵ and argues that, "the

portrait of Babylonian Jewry as struggling toward increased liberalization of such laws needs to be adjusted.”⁶⁶ Her evidence shows a rabbinic concern with Gentile feasts later than the third century CE tannaitic strata. Reasons for such a concern go beyond the present study;⁶⁷ nevertheless, their concerns emphasize the communal importance of such gatherings. The undefined inclusions of wedding feasts as well as their communal importance bolsters the fragmentary evidence that explicitly locates the bride and other women at the wedding feast.

Out-of-Control Wedding Feasts—Moderating the Wildness

In weighing the evidence for women at wedding meals and attempting to interpret the many silences in light of the communal pull of these events, one must also consider whether the potential for danger or scandal at wedding meals mitigated that draw. Quite a few narratives describe risqué or raucous goings on at wedding meals, tipping the balance toward considering these as dangerous affairs. The least egregious trespass of normal societal bounds by these feasts involved the late hour. Rabbinic mention of the lateness of wedding feasts occurs in a tannaitic discussion of what to do if one has forgotten to recite the evening “*Sh’ma*” prayer, as occurred when those within the rabbinic community stayed at wedding feasts until after midnight.⁶⁸ Likewise in Luke 12.36–8 we learn of a servant who remains awake for his master’s return from feast.⁶⁹ Wedding parties went beyond normal bounds, but not always outrageously so.

Sometimes the late hour may itself pose a threat. Minor tractate *Semachot* (3rd–8th c. CE) tells of death and mayhem as the hour grows later and later, recalling the arrival of the centaurs, in Greek sources⁷⁰: “The prudent among them began leaving during the ninth hour of the day Others rose to leave at sunset Others left during the second and third hour of the night, while some shops were open and others were closed Those remaining were overcome with wine and fell to killing and wounding each other.”⁷¹ Other dangers concern explicitly immodest behaviors. Cyprian describes the threat to virgin wedding guests: “How greatly a virgin falls short of her resolution, when she who had come there [to a wedding] modest goes away immodest! Although she may remain a virgin in body and mind, yet in eyes, in ears, in tongue, she has diminished the virtues that she possessed.”⁷² Cyprian indicates that these women attend feasts but ought not. All expected Greek and Roman wedding songs to be bawdy.⁷³ We also see bawdiness in wedding songs by the nominally Christian Ausonius (4th c. CE).⁷⁴

The *Acts of Thomas* portray everyone eating and drinking, except the apostle. Then servants provide the guests with crowns and anointing oil and

other comforts, but the apostle accepts only a crown woven of myrtle, while refusing the sexual advances of a flute girl. The *Acts of Thomas* depicts an enthusiastic banquet and Thomas's own self-restraint.⁷⁵ As in so many of our texts, we find no explicit mention of women guests, or women participants other than the flute girl. Meanwhile, anointing oil appears in two rabbinic texts that concern weddings, neither of which mentions women. One accepts it as a matter of course, and we learn that the "dripping of oil on the 'heads' of scholars" affords proof that a public wedding had occurred and that the bride was a virgin.⁷⁶ The other text prohibits anointing oil.⁷⁷ This wonderfully complicates the line between luxurious-but-acceptable-feasts as opposed to feasts that are over the top.

Excesses at weddings also provoked sermons from John Chrysostom, decrying: "superfluities and inanities, . . . devilish rites, . . . cymbals and pipes and dances, [with] their screaming."⁷⁸ Once again we learn that wedding celebrations tested social boundaries. Similarly, in a talmudic account (4th–6th c. CE), a rabbi breaks a glass to curtail the creeping wildness. Whether these tales have any relation to the much later custom of breaking a glass at weddings is anybody's guess, but for our purposes they describe wild feasting that begs for a moderating hand:

Mar son of Rabina made the wedding feast for his son. When he noticed that the Rabbis were very wild, he brought a precious cup worth four hundred Zuz, and broke it before them and they immediately became sad.⁷⁹

We do not hear of women guests, we know only of rabbis who are wild. The danger this wildness poses is unspecified.

We also find voices urging restraint and suggesting a vision of more moderation in weddings celebrations. The *Acts of Thomas*, Chrysostom, and the excerpts from the Babylonian Talmud simultaneously suggest the wild behaviors and authorial concern. Cyprian urged virgins to stay away. The fourth-century Council of Laodicea warned of immodest behavior:

Canon 53. Christians, when they attend weddings, must not join in wanton dances, but modestly dine or breakfast, as is becoming to Christians.

Canon 54. Members of the priesthood and of the clergy must not witness the plays at weddings or banquets; but, before the players enter, they must rise and depart.

Thus we see concern for both lay and clergy guests. Peter Brown contrasts the concern for clergy at weddings with Chrysostom's call for marrying couples

to have a priest offer a blessing. For Brown, Canon 54 demonstrates the marginal impact of the practice John advocates: "Priests were rarely invited to these occasions; and those who came were advised to leave early."⁸⁰ I suggest, instead, that we read this as implying that priests came because "everyone" came, whether they were invited "as priests" or not, but this raised concerns. Given their special concerns regarding modesty, priests must either leave early or move to reshape these events.

Tracing the earliest involvement of Christian officials at Christian weddings, as well as new possibilities, David Hunter finds "little evidence of any specifically Christian rituals in North African Christianity at least through the lifetime of Augustine," he does observe that "[b]ishops were sometimes (probably often) invited to be present to sign the marriage contracts." Nevertheless, he finds nothing to compare with the blessings associated with Ambrose or Siricius, occurring in fourth-century Italy "at the hands of a bishop."⁸¹ Like Chrysostom's call, the involvement of these clergymen suggests the inclusion of explicitly Christian practices at weddings, and implies the presence of at least some "Christian" guests as well. In other words, in contrast to *Acts of Thomas* in which the Apostle hijacks the weddings, ignores the guests and converts the bride and groom to a celibate lifestyle, these other early Christian voices stake out a presence at weddings rather than overturn or abandon a dangerous situation. This further explains the above concerns of the presence of the priest, but we find no mention of women other than the bride. Again we look for the concern for female modesty at weddings but find no evidence.

Rabbinic literature walks the same line concerning embracing weddings despite dangerous behaviors. In addition to the accounts of rabbis breaking a glass to settle the revelers, another section of Talmud warns: "All know for what purpose a bride enters the wedding chamber, yet for one *who speaks obscenely* [about these things], even a confirmed sentence of seventy years' happiness is reversed [and replaced with one] for evil."⁸² In addition to such concerns regarding what not to say, like Chrysostom and Ambrose, rabbis also begin to formulate blessings for a wedding. This is prescriptive language, presenting an authorized vision of both bride and groom. And perhaps with these blessings the rabbis also forged a more formal role for themselves.⁸³ Unfortunately for our inquiry, their concerns about appropriate language never mention whether women as well as men attend these occasions. All the authorities above take for granted that women were either absent or present. In the case of rabbinic concerns about language, three quite different intertexts concerning the presence of women stand available to us: the Mishnah, which assigns wives the right

to attend weddings; the story of Akiba's daughter, who was not at the feast with the other guests; and the furious R. Eliezer, encountering the bride at the table. Nevertheless, while these texts emphasize that this was a contested issue, the silences do not even tell us if women were a relevant concern when it came to obscene language. Efforts to reform weddings by Christianizing or Judaizing them address some of their inherent wildness, but do not explicitly appeal to the role of women guests. This serves as another indication that the danger of weddings did not pervasively concern women or supply a reason to exclude them.

Did Young Women Attend Wedding Feasts?

Finally, let us consider one more category. Having already considered women guests, the bride, and how the threat or danger plays out at weddings, we may come to examine the possibility that the matron had a right to attend, but that the maiden would have been excluded, as we have already seen Cyprian suggest. After all, even male youths had to attain a certain age in order to be included in Greek symposia.⁸⁴ It thus seems reasonable to consider that the community might exclude maidens from wedding feasts, even as they included adult females and males. Once again, the limitations of the sources make absolute conclusions difficult; however, the evidence here also suggests inclusion. Peter Foss argues, concerning feasts, that "the point at which free youths would be allowed to dine formally as an adult at table is not entirely clear, but it was probably marriage for girls."⁸⁵ As evidence he cites a wedding poem by Catullus (1st c. BCE) wherein the "of age" bride appears in attendance. Ironically, on further consideration the poem also reveals maidens in addition to the bride. The poem is not altogether clear, but after the men rise from the table, the young women also "rise": "View ye the Youths, O Maids unwed? Then rise to withstand them . . ."⁸⁶ The maidens rising with the youths allow for the strong possibility that they also rise from meal tables. This evidence then appears to demonstrate the opposite, that young girls were *not excluded* from attending wedding feasts.

While we find less reason to conclude that young women feasted, the evidence clearly demonstrates that they often helped the bride prepare for the wedding. The helpers appear in literary sources as well as pottery remains, in fact, giving their name to one sort of pottery: *Loutrophoros* technically means "*someone* who carries the bath-water." A "bride helper" carried water in a *loutrophoros* for bathing the bride before her wedding. Such a vase also served as a grave gift. Additionally, a tomb marker might depict female bridal helpers.⁸⁷ A grave marker from Leontopolis (2nd c. BCE – 2nd

c. CE), identified as Jewish, describes those who “decked” out the bride (*numpokomoi*), in other words, bridal helpers.⁸⁸ If this stone did belong to the Jewish cemetery, it becomes one of the earliest examples of a Jewish text describing a bride with some sort of “other” or companion to dress her for her wedding.

Likewise, we see young women in Pseudo-Philo’s *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* (1st–2nd c. CE) as they join Jephtha’s daughter, Seila, who prepares herself for death rather than a wedding because of her father’s vow. Her speech describes how the women who would have prepared her for her wedding now prepare her for her funeral:

O mother, it was in vain you bore your only daughter,
for hell (*infernus*) has become my bridal bed . . .
and the flowers in the garland my nurse plaited will wither in time,
and the hyacinth coverlet I wove with my own skill,
and my purple dress, worms will ruin.
And my maiden friends, when they tell of me,
shall weep and groan for me through the days.⁸⁹

These women “with whom Seila shares an intimate bond,”⁹⁰ become central to Seila’s presentation of herself and her aborted wedding. We thus find young women assumed to at least provide companionship to Seila, whether at wedding or funeral. In all of the above examples such women appear as part of wedding, if not necessarily the wedding feasts.

Another poem of Catullus surprisingly places maidens at the very door of the wedding chamber (and thus also nearer the next round of feasting?). This reference appears startling because we find “maidens” situated adjacent to bawdy teasing of the bride and groom outside the wedding chamber:

Now husband, you may approach:
your wife is in your bedroom . . .
Play as you please, and
produce children soon. It is not right
for so ancient a name to
be lacking in children, but rather it should always
be reproduced from the same stock . . .
Maidens, close the doors:
we have played enough. Good
wedded people, live well and
keep your youth fit and strong in constant
exercise of its function.⁹¹

In the poem the “maidens” who will close the door have overheard all this teasing and witnessed the bride and groom as they wait for the doors to shut. This is in keeping with Cyprian’s concern about what virgins hear. The only question concerns whether processing entitled these young women to share in the feast. Whether or not they joined in whatever feasting had occurred, or was to occur, they certainly were not sheltered from the erotic charge of this wedding. The juxtaposition of “maidens” with the bawdy speech addressed to the newly-weds may indicate that weddings belonged outside normal rules. While normally families may have protected their maidens from sexually charged situations, weddings may have served as the “exception that proved the rule.” We can, of course, imagine that the poet includes maidens where they had not been,⁹² but we can also see young girls in many of the events surrounding weddings.

One final text explicitly shows maidens entering the banquet. In this parable from Matthew, 10 bridesmaids wait for the bridegroom.⁹³ Only five have come equipped with enough oil. Significantly “while they [the five without oil] went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut.”⁹⁴ For the sake of the parable they must be included in the banquet so that the watchful receive their reward of inclusion. Following this episode Jesus concludes by interpreting the parable: “Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.” On the other hand, parables work best if they draw on understandable images. Thus this text certainly suggests that some wedding feasts included maidens, at least in the initial stages.

Although we’ve seen young women in events surrounding the feast, and even entering the banquet itself, we cannot know whether attendants received official invitations, or whether it was just presumed that local young women who were relatives and friends of the bride would, after preparing the bride, stay for appropriate parts of the day. Nevertheless, unless we determine to read all silences regarding women as negatives, we cannot easily decide that the feast excluded young women. Matthew taken together with Cyprian and Catullus makes it hard on the one hand to conclude that those “present” never included maidens as well as matrons. Perhaps the issue comes down to the real danger of rape or seduction to young, single, women rather than danger to the sensibilities of the community. One can imagine that an isolated young woman might well be compromised in a feasting situation, and yet, at a wedding, if a group of young women appeared together, and if together occupied the couches described by Lucian or Athenaeus, their numbers might have provided some protection, no matter how much bawdiness or innuendo accompanied the occasion.

Conclusions

Having thus navigated fragments that mention women and much larger silences we see more reason than not to conclude that women, even young women, joined with the rest of the community to celebrate weddings. We also find much variation as well as select evidence that contested this practice, so we may also imagine certain times and places where wedding festivities excluded women. Nevertheless, the critiques themselves, popping up from century to century amid different cultures, demonstrate that exclusion was not the standard policy. Numerous accounts suggest the importance of wedding festivities to the entire community. We also considered the dangers associated with wedding meals, but they seemed after all not to discourage the participation of women.

Notes

1. I wish to thank Debra Bucher for her insightful and helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper; my former student, Emma Cawfield, for logistical help; and Hal Taussig and Dennis Smith for their editing and their lead.
2. Tobit 7.15–8.3a NRSV.
3. *Acts Thom.* 1.9–11 (343), translation adapted from Drijvers, “The Acts of Thomas.”
4. *b. Sukkah* 25b.
5. Lehman observes the nonprivate nature of the *Sukkah* in this text as she presents the ways that the rabbis consider the *sukkah* as *different* from a house, “The Gendered Rhetoric,” 328.
6. Anderson, “The Garden of Eden,” 57–8.
7. Smith considers this a “popular literary motif,” *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 40.
8. Corley, *Private Women, Public Meals*, 28–33, and see Aitken, Ascough, Harland, Klinghardt, and Standhartinger in this volume.
9. Grossman, “Reading for Gender,” 227–233.
10. Baker, *Rebuilding the House*, 34–76.
11. Baker *Rebuilding the House*, 75.
12. Wallace-Hadrill, *Houses and Society*, 186. He indicates that “attempts to seek ... distinctions ... in the Roman house look unconvincing,” 218 n.30.
13. Osiek and MacDonald, *A Woman’s Place*, 3.
14. Pace Oakley and Sinos, *The Wedding in Ancient Athens*, 5.
15. Rehm, *Marriage to Death*, 18, reminds that ancient Greek practice included the sacrifice and meal offered by the new husband “for phratry members” some days after the wedding.
16. On Roman weddings: Treggiari, *Roman Marriage*, 169. In the Greek tradition, this next reception began at dawn and included a time for opening gifts.
17. Oakley and Sinos, *The Wedding in Ancient Athens*, 24, figs. 46–9.

18. Treggiari, *Roman Marriage*, 161.
19. Treggiari, *Roman Marriage*, 167.
20. Plutarch (*Quaest. conv.* 666f-67a), cited by Oakley and Sinos, *The Wedding in Ancient Athens*, 22.
21. Athenaeus 14.644d-f. Cited by Oakley and Sinos, *The Wedding in Ancient Athens*, 22; and by Corley, *Private Women, Public Meals*, 29.
22. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 43; Corley, *Private Women, Public Meals*, 29; citing Lucian, *Symp.* 8–9.
23. Llewelyn, “Paul’s Advice,” 63, referring to pOxy. 111 and pOxy. 1579. See also Lefkowitz and Fant, *Women’s Life*, 205.
24. *m. Ketub.* 7.5.
25. Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 6.24.
26. Hague argues of Greek weddings: “women reclined on banquet couches apart from the men, with the bride among them,” but she offers no sources, “Marriage Athenian Style,” 34.
27. Roller, 2003, 378–9, citing Isidorus *Etym.* 20.11.9, and Valerius Maximus 2.1.2.
28. Roller, “Horizontal Women,” 409, although many monuments portray a woman reclining to dine alone, 406.
29. Roller, “Horizontal Women,” 399.
30. Roller, “Horizontal Women,” 401.
31. Treggiari, *Roman Marriage*, 169, citing Tacitus, *Ann.* 11.27.1, 15.37.9, and Juvenal, *Sat.* 10.333ff, 2.119–120.
32. Treggiari, *Roman Marriage*, 422, writing in general of birthday parties, betrothals, funerals, and weddings, citing Fronto, *ad M. Caes.* 2.8, 9, *Ep. gr.* 2 (LCL i.144. ff.).
33. Roller, “Horizontal Women,” 403, citing Tacitus, *Ann.* 11.27.
34. *Dysk.*, 949, cited by Oakley and Sinos, *The Wedding in Ancient Athens*, 22.
35. Roller, “Horizontal Women,” 410.
36. John 2.1–11.
37. Oakley and Sinos, *The Wedding in Ancient Athens*, 38; Rehm, *Marriage to Death*, 142.
38. Oakley and Sinos, *The Wedding in Ancient Athens*, 25, see 135 n.19. Note the difficulty in trying to establish “normative” practice. Patterson, “Marriage and the Married Woman,” nevertheless concludes “[a]lthough there are real problems in reconciling the sources on this point, I prefer to connect the unveiling with the prenuptial feast. There may, or course, have been variation in marriage practices,” 68 n40.
39. Rehm, *Marriage to Death*, 142, 213n6, citing Pottier and Reinach, Toutain, Huddleston, Buxton, Sissa, and Hague.
40. Carson, “Putting Her in Her Place,” 163–164. Oakley and Sinos argue against Carson, *The Wedding in Ancient Athens*, 135n17.
41. Dio Cassius 48.44.3, trans. E. Cary, LCL. Also mentioned by Foss, “Kitchens and Dining Rooms,” 46; and Osiek and McDonald, *A Woman’s Place*, 159.
42. Cyprian, *Hab. virg.*, 18.

43. Hunter, "Augustine and the Making of Marriage," 63.
44. Ambrose, *Epistulae* 62.7 (CCSL 82/2.124), my translation.
45. Although the daughter of R. Akiba is not referred to by name, neither is her groom.
46. *b. Sabb.* 156b. For a sense of the pervasiveness of fears at the time of weddings, note the parallels between this story and the predictions of Psyche's death in Apuleius, *Met.*, 4.33.
47. It should also be noted that the snake of this wedding chamber shares some features with the demon in Tobit. Schwarzbaum, "The Hero Predestined to Die," describes Tobit as fitting folktale type AT934B.
48. *Kallah* 1.3, trans. Brodsky, *A Bride without a Blessing*.
49. *b. Ber.* 51b, see further discussion in Brodsky, *A Bride without a Blessing*.
50. Neusner's inclusive translation names this the blessing of "the wedding couple," *The Talmud of the Land of Israel*. Elsewhere Adler would like to avoid calling this blessing the bridegrooms' blessing, as "it was never recited by the bridegroom" and the text explicitly refers to both members of the couple, *Engendering Judaism*, 180, n.50. Nevertheless, I have preserved the literal translation since the rabbinic presentation of the blessing does not appear to present the bride as sharing the blessing with the groom.
51. This analogy between a bride and a corpse enlarges on a discussion of appropriate wedding days and asks why a widow should marry on Thursday. As last word in the debate, the gemara responds: "Moses ordained seven days of banqueting [for a wedding] and seven days of mourning. But [there is no indication] that he ordained a thing in celebration of the marriage of a widow."
52. *p. Ketub.* 1.1, 25a; translation adapted from Neusner, *The Talmud of the Land of Israel*, 23–4.
53. "R. Nahman said [that] Rab said, 'Bridegrooms are of the number [for the *minyan* officially required for recitation] and [at funerals] mourners are not of the number . . . ;'" *b. Ketub.* 8a. Buchler, "The Induction of the Bride," 129, suggests that the blessing takes place before the groom leaves for the wedding chamber.
54. *b. Ketub.* 7b–8a. In later times these blessing are known as *sheva brachot* or "seven blessings." The first of seven is the blessing for wine, which was not included in the talmudic presentation. The last three blessings appear in the continuation of the Talmud text:
 - (4) "May the barren greatly rejoice and exult when her sons/children will be gathered in her midst in joy. Blessed are you, O Lord, who makes Zion joyful with her sons/children,"
 - (5) "May you make the loved companions greatly to rejoice even as of old you did gladden your creature in the Garden of Eden. Blessed are you, O Lord, who makes bridegroom and bride rejoice."
 - (6) "'Blessed are you, O Lord our God, king of the universe, who has created joy and gladness, bridegroom and bride, rejoicing, song, mirth, and delight, love and brotherhood, peace and friendship. Speedily, O Lord our God, may

there be heard in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voice of the singing of bridegrooms from their huppot (wedding chambers) and of youths from their feasts of song. Blessed are you, O Lord, who makes the bridegroom to rejoice with the bride” (translation adapted from Soncino edition).

55. For further discussion of the grooms’ blessing see Marks, *First Came Marriage*, forthcoming.
56. *m. Ta’an.* 4.8 provides an allegorical comparison, which includes the Temple as the wedding chamber. See Rev 19.7–9. See also Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 169.
57. Matt 22.8–9, NRSV, my italics.
58. Osiek and MacDonald, *A Woman’s Place*, 6, also discuss the concealment of information by masc. pl. pronouns.
59. Matt 22.11.
60. *Acts Thom*, 1.4 (340), trans. Drijvers, “The Acts of Thomas.”
61. Levine indicates that this synagogue in Susiya was built in the third–fifth century CE, presenting the inscription: “May he be remembered for good, the holy master R. Asi the priest [who is also honored by the title] *biribbi*, who made this mosaic and plastered the walls, [a contribution] which he donated at a [wedding?] banquet for his son . . .” Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue*, 198, bracketed explanations are his. See also 494, re: Naveh, *On Stone and Mosaic*, 1978, #75, 115.
62. See Bregman, “The Parable of the Lame.”
63. The *Apocryphon* is cited by Epiphanius, *Pan.* 64.70.5–7, discussed in Wright, “Talking with God,” 292.
64. Hayes, *Between the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds*, 160–162, discussing *t. Abod. Zar* 4.6 and *b. Abod. Zar.* 8a, translation Hayes.
65. Hayes writes: “in regard to the social question, the Bavli utilizes an aggadic tradition to establish a halakhic standard . . . allowing the development of a set of remarkably stringent halakhot unprecedented in the Palestinian sources,” *Between the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds*, 154.
66. Hayes, *Between the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds*, 165.
67. See Marks, *First Came Marriage*, forthcoming.
68. *m. Ber.* 1.1.
69. Llewelyn, “Paul’s Advice,” 65.
70. See section 2 above.
71. *Sem* 8.10.
72. Cyprian, *Hab. virg.*, 18.
73. Rehm, *Marriage to Death*, 17. Tregiarri, *Roman Marriage*, 166.
74. Ausonius, *A Nuptial Cento*, 8 (LCL 384–391). In the LCL edition, 1919, Latin faces Latin as section 8 describes the groom’s “hot-blooded” erection, with no English translation. Sheerin, speaks of Ausonius’ *Cento* as a “ludicrous” lifting of familiar texts and asks whether an ensemble constitutes a text, “The Ensemble of ‘Proper’ Texts.”

75. *Acts Thom*, 1.4–8 (340–3), translation Drijvers, “The Acts of Thomas.” Thomas also demonstrates prophetic abilities as he promises (in Hebrew) that the cup-bearer who smites him will be dragged away by dogs, which then happens.
76. *b. Ketub.* 17b.
77. *t. Sotah.* 15.9
78. Chrysostom, *Homiliae in Genesim* 48, translation Hill, *Saint John Chrysostom*, 112.
79. *b. Ber.* 30b–31a, translation adapted from Lauterbach, “The Ceremony of Breaking a Glass,” 350. The text continues with R. Ashi experiencing the same wildness and also breaking a glass in response.
80. Brown, *The Body and Society*, 313, n. 49.
81. Hunter, “Augustine and the Making of Marriage,” 83. In asking these questions, Hunter makes apparent the need for a new study of Christian marriage practice. Ritzer, *Le Mariage Dans Les Eglises Chrétiennes*, and Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessings*, both provide a lot of information, but rely on uncritical assumptions where Jewish practice is concerned.
82. *b. Sabb.* 33a.
83. See Marks, *First Came Marriage*, forthcoming.
84. Booth, “The Age for Reclining.”
85. Foss, “Kitchens and Dining Rooms,” 46.
86. Catullus, *Carmina*, 62.1–6, trans. R.F. Burton.
87. Rehm, *Marriage to Death*, 14–5 and 27–9.
88. JIGRE 31.
89. Pseudo-Philo, *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* 40.6; Alexiou and Dronke, “The Lament of Jephtha’s Daughter,” 823.
90. Baker, “Pseudo-Philo,” 201.
91. Catullus, *Carmina*, 61, selected verses from lines 184–228, translated by Godwin, *Catullus: Poems 61–68*.
92. Godwin, translator of this poem, reminds us that this is a literary creation and it is “unlikely that the poem was actually sung to accompany the wedding itself: attempts to match the words to the actions of the Roman wedding ceremony are unconvincing,” 100. See such an attempt in Thomsen, *Ritual and Desire*.
93. Matt 25.1. Duling’s note in HarperCollins study Bible suggests that they wait for the bride and groom.
94. Matt 25.10.

CHAPTER 9

Evidence for Slaves at the Table in the Ancient Mediterranean: From Traditional Rural Festivals to Urban Associations

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The custom of reclining at meals in the ancient Mediterranean typically excluded slaves. Whether celebrated in the private home or in a civic space designed for public dining, the reclining banquet was a meal specifically set aside for social and political peers, namely men of citizen status.¹ Among the Roman upper-classes citizen, women reclined alongside men; to a much lesser extent this was also true in Greece. But even though slaves were typically treated as mere bodies that served the needs of those in power, on a handful of occasions during Greek and Roman antiquity it appears that slaves did recline at meals. Many, but not all, of these occasions can be traced back to early agricultural festivals; during the Roman Empire other dining customs emerged that allowed slaves the freedom to dine as though they were free.

Slaveholding was a part of the everyday landscape in the culturally Greek cities of the eastern Mediterranean basin under Roman rule in the first centuries of the common era. The basic fact of chattel slavery lay at the foundation of the Greek and Roman economies, though local customs surrounding slavery sometimes differed. Early Christian communities and households no less than their neighboring Greek and Roman counterparts inherited social and economic structures (with their accompanying ideologies) that assumed

slaves were merely available human bodies that could be put to any number of uses.²

Even though slaves were culturally constructed as available bodies, Roman and Greek cultic practices made room for slaves at the reclining banquet, albeit in very circumscribed circumstances. This essay will outline some of those few occasions when scholars believe slaves could recline at meals. I will review evidence, looking first to three cities in the Greek end of the Mediterranean, then briefly discussing some parallel customs in the Roman Empire, before offering a few synthetic comments and preliminary conclusions about slaves and the rituals of dining. Throughout I am working under the assumption that the reclining banquet was for many centuries a common and recognizable custom throughout the Greek and Roman worlds, one that offers us today an important window into the social, cultural, religious, and political contexts of Mediterranean antiquity. At the same time I also draw attention to some cultural differences in dining practices that are apparent across time and space. In this paper I am also assuming that those who attended the reclining banquets, whether slave or free, inhabited a symbolic cosmos that was home to both gods and mortals alike.

Some Dining Customs in Hellas

Strictly speaking, the reclining banquet and the symposium were not customs that were native to Greece. While the sacrificial meal and warrior feast were forms of commensality with deep Greek roots, sympotic rituals entered the Hellenic world most likely during the archaic period of the late-eighth and early-seventh centuries BCE. The custom of reclining at the meal traveled westward within Asia Minor from non-Greek Lydia into Greek Ionia and the mainland of Hellas, where it merged with traditional Greek feasting rituals. Homer depicted warriors and aristocrats in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* reclining on couches as they feasted; this reflected not so much the customs of twelfth-century Mycenaean palace culture, but rather social reality at the time when the oral epic tradition was fixed and written down, probably toward the end of the eighth century BCE. By the seventh century the symposium had become a more exclusive social occasion where citizens of the elite class met with their peers in private homes to discuss politics, business, and the life of the *polis*. At such a symposium the common meal, or *deipnon*, was separate from the practice of drinking together. It was not until after the meal that ritualized drinking and conversation commenced. Wives and other citizen women were not present on these occasions, and the presence of male and female sex workers was common.

Household slaves prepared the meal beforehand, served the food and wine, offered musical or other entertainment, and provided sexual services. The *komos*, a type of rowdy procession following the formal banquet and shared drinking, took the symposium outside into the larger world. During this ritual of public revelry and exhibitionism the diners left the private sphere and displayed their power and social cohesion to the other residents of the community.³

What began in the seventh century as a Panhellenic custom that was shared among the nobles throughout Greece over time became particularized in each *polis*. Some *poleis* (pl.) constructed public dining rooms for use at civic festivals that featured the rituals of *thysia*, the civic sacrifice of large herd animals and the distribution of meat that followed.⁴ Each city had its own traditions, its own individual annual calendar, and its own festivals. In Athens, the *polis* that provides the best combination of literary and archeological evidence, such public dining complexes were composed of small banquet rooms that would typically accommodate anywhere between seven and fifteen couches for up to thirty reclining diners. In Sparta the common messes were said to be limited to 15. In these public dining rooms throughout Hellas citizens transmitted their social, religious, and political values, and observed a type of commensality that reinforced the power structure of the *polis* and celebrated the worship of ancestral gods.

Greeks easily adapted to the diversity in particular local dining practices, just as they adapted to other local variations in custom. The various Hellenic communities in Ionia, mainland Greece, and Sicily and Italy did not maintain the same calendar. They did not observe a common New Year, and their calendars did not even share the same names for the 12 lunar months. Each *polis* was responsible for keeping its own festivals and celebrating them according to received ancestral custom. Each city likewise had its own particular way of structuring the workforce: the institution of slavery in Ionian Athens was not the same as it was among the Laconian and Messenian residents of Sparta. As the festival calendars developed over time in each *polis*, the citizens of the *poleis* adapted and incorporated the reclining banquet in their own way, and came to include slaves at festivals in ways that reflected their own particular economies and ideologies. The sketch below looks at dining customs in three different locations in the classical period: Athens, Sparta, and Corinth. Slaves were allowed to recline at meals on certain occasions in these cities. Looking carefully at the civic and festival contexts will highlight some of the regional differences that existed in traditional banquet practices, and this will in turn help us better understand what it meant when slaves reclined at a meal.

Reclining in Athens: Slaves at Leisure in the *oikos*

Following the Persian Wars in the fifth century BCE, Athens became a city that was committed to dining in both the public and the private spheres. Much of the evidence for the ancient symposium comes from this period in Athenian history. Public dining rooms furnished with couches were available for citizens both on festival days in the *polis* calendar, and on nonfestival days. Large dining complexes were built in or near the Agora—the Tholos, the Prytaneion, the South Stoa, and the Pompeion—and even on top of the Acropolis, where the north gallery of the Propylaea served as a civic dining room, and inventories of the Parthenon listed the number of couches that the Athenians owned and maintained for civic banquets.⁵ Even with all these civic dining rooms there was not enough indoor couch space for every citizen attending a public banquet. At civic festivals only a select few men could have reclined indoors in the public dining rooms, and most other men must have dined outdoors, perhaps eating their meals in the shaded porticoes of the public stoas, under portable shelters called *skenai*, or reclining on the ground under a tree. Slaves were doubtless necessary to help carry out the essential tasks that accompanied the rituals of *thysia*, civic worship, and public dining. Indeed, one class of slaves called public slaves, or *demosioi*, were owned and maintained by the city, and another group of public slaves lived near the civic sanctuaries and temples that they took care of. Even so slaves were considered ritually invisible in public worship; there are no prayers recorded for them, no portion of the meat was set aside for their benefit, and they were essentially no more than spectators to rites controlled by their masters.⁶

Still, in the Athenian state calendar, slaves did recline at a handful of festivals: the Anthesteria, the rural Dionysia, and the Cronia. Athenians celebrated these three civic festivals with a distribution of meat to be commonly consumed in the city's public spaces and banquets rooms. In addition, all three festivals were celebrated in and around the home, or *oikos*. The *Cronia* was a festival that honored Cronos on the 12th of Hecatombaion, the first month in the Attic calendar corresponding to late June in the Roman calendar. Cronos, the father of Zeus, was at an earlier time a deity with strong agricultural associations linked to the cultivation of grain, and the Cronia festival marked the official end of the grain harvest. Ritual inversion ruled the day for this festival: slaves dined alongside their masters in a harvest festival where all the laborers ceased from their toil and celebrated together.⁷ As fewer and fewer Athenians earned their livelihood from the land, the summer festival for Cronos continued to be celebrated as one where slaves enjoyed unusual privileges and liberties. After all, the mythical

age of Cronos had been an age without slaves. Already in the fifth century the Cronia was considered old fashioned,⁸ and yet slaves still raucously celebrated the festival in Plutarch's time some six centuries later.⁹ Little is really known about the festival beyond the kind of role reversal that it demanded. When the festival was over the social hierarchies that accompanied the reign of Zeus were once again put back in place.¹⁰

The other two Attic festivals that allowed slaves to dine with their masters were both festivals sacred to the god Dionysos. Once the grape harvest was celebrated in the fall, the grapes pressed and the new wine sealed in storage jars, the Athenian ritual calendar focused on entertainment, relaxation, and creative expression found in the worship of Dionysos.¹¹ At this god's festivals, worshippers directly experienced Dionysian transformation and the inversion of power relationships through the rituals of dining, drinking, and dramatic production. The rural Dionysia were a series of festivals celebrated during the month of Poseideon, corresponding to late December and January. At numerous local festivals throughout Attica held over the course of several weeks, Athenian residents drank, relaxed, and watched plays. These festivals did not focus on the seat of urban life and political power in Athens, but rather reflected the deep agricultural roots of the *polis* in the rural districts of Attica. In demes and villages townspeople celebrated Dionysos with processions, old-fashioned fun and games, and deeply traditional symbols. At their most basic, the rural Dionysia featured processions, and ribald, abusive (but nevertheless ancestral) songs. The central symbol of the god in the festive procession was an oversized phallos made of wood and leather. On Attic vases that depict the procession, young men are dwarfed by the phallos pole they support together on their shoulders. The procession ended with civic sacrifice at a public altar followed by communal feasting and drinking.¹² After the public meals, men played traditional games and sang the customary phallic songs of humor and abuse. Scholiasts and late antique commentators who discussed the games played at the Rural Dionysia especially made mention of jumping and balancing games—hopping up and down on one leg, and trying to stay balanced atop a greased goatskin that was filled with wine. Doubtless the goatskin of wine did not stay full for long. In many ways these rituals, abusive songs, and competitions resembled the *komos* that traditionally followed celebrations of private symposia.

A comic version of the Dionysian procession and song is preserved in the *Acharnians*, a play produced by the Athenian comic poet Aristophanes in 425 BCE. In this comedy, the hero's daughter, serving as basket-bearer or *kanephoros*, led the sacrificial procession; the slave who processed behind her carried the phallos on a pole, while the hero Dicaeopolis sang a song of abuse that roughly criticized the current politicians in the city

(*Ach.* 241 ff.). Later evidence for the celebration of the rural Dionysia reinforces Dicaeopolis' inclusion of his slave Xanthias in this comic depiction of the festival. Plutarch's first-century CE description of the traditional Dionysian festivals in the countryside included the vine and a jar of wine in the procession alongside the goat and the phallos, and he noted this was a time when slaves and masters dined together.¹³

Theater and the attendant worship of the god Dionysos was another area of Athenian culture where slaves became openly celebrated alongside their masters; even enslaved women could publicly assume pivotal roles when celebrating Dionysos.¹⁴ There is strong evidence for dramatic performances that took place at some celebrations of the rural Dionysia in Attica. Inscriptional records of fifth-century decrees detail the rites, sacrifices and proceedings at local festivals, and sometimes these details mention dramatic productions. In at least three outlying rural demes, archeologists have unearthed remains of small stone theaters that can be dated to the classical period. Such theaters were evidently built for the rural Dionysia; the oblong theater in Thoricus is the best preserved of these. Since the rural Dionysia were celebrated on a rolling basis throughout the demes of Attica, it seems reasonable to speculate that traveling companies of actors made the rounds during this month of local festivals, along with citizens and residents who took pleasure in watching the dramatic productions. An anecdote from Plato's *Republic* provides us with perhaps the clearest picture of how Athenians celebrated the Rural Dionysia in the late fifth century. The dialogue describes how men "eager to see new things" traveled from village to village at this time of year to attend as many Dionysian festivals as they could (Plato *Resp.* 5.475). Given that work obligations were not terribly demanding during the winter months, it is easy to imagine residents taking a break and crisscrossing the countryside of Attica for a few weeks. Observing this festival meant visiting relatives and friends and sharing in free meals financed by the demes, all the while imbibing wine in the worship of the god and celebrating alongside slaves who were given leave to rest from their work. The opportunity to see slaves portrayed sympathetically on the stage was a regular feature of traditional Dionysian worship. It is hard to know the personal impact of this experience, and our sources do not record individuals' responses, but Athenians highly valued the competitive dramatic festivals, and awarded significant prizes to the poets who won first prize. Many prize-winning plays depicted slaves sympathetically.

The second of the Dionysian festivals observed by slaves was the Anthesteria, the most important festival celebrated in the month of Anthesterion, the month that marked the first arrival of wildflowers (*anthea*) in Attica, roughly late February or early March. In the spring of the year this

festival celebrated the civilizing power of Dionysos experienced in the transformation of the harvested grape into wine, the essential beverage of Greek ritual practice and human social interaction. New wine that had been stored in the fall was for the first time opened in the spring at a three-day festival that ran from the 11th to the 13th of Anthesterion. The Anthesteria was one of the oldest of Athenian festivals, widely observed among *poleis* that claimed an Ionian heritage and so probably dating back to at least the eighth century. While each day of the Anthesteria had its own particular mood and festivities, all three days alike brought to mind the god who helped civilize humans with the gift of the vine and the knowledge of how to turn the grape into wine.¹⁵

It was the second of the three festival days, the day called the *Choes*, or Jugs, that included slaves in the dining and drinking rituals. The community at large observed the *Choes* by gathering both as a civic group in the Agora, and afterwards in individual homes. In both public and private celebrations the customs of wine drinking were turned on their head. Under normal circumstances outside the bounds of this festival, citizen men drank together among their peers at a symposium in a citizen's home, or else they shared a meal in one of the public dining rooms found in the Agora. Reclining on couches in a dining room, male citizens were typically served from a common mixing-bowl of wine (*krater*) supplied by the host. The host was also responsible for diluting the wine with water in whatever proportion he thought best. At smaller domestic symposia and in the larger public dining facilities, male citizens normally segregated themselves from women and slaves, and drank their wine among political peers while enjoying lively conversation and argument. Contrary to all these normal customs of drinking, at the *Choes* Athenians watched a traditional drinking ritual in which prominent public figures competed against each other. A trumpet call signaled the start of this unusual race and the priest of Dionysos oversaw that the proper rules were followed. Each person participating in the drinking contest brought his own wine already mixed in his jug as well as his own wine cup; he sat upright at his own table, and drank the new wine in complete and solemn silence. The first person to finish his three-liter jug of wine was declared the winner. Sources list a variety of items as prizes: a goatskin full of wine or a cake specially baked for the occasion.¹⁶

On this second day of Anthesteria the typical Dionysian shift in normal behaviors played a part not only in the heart of the *polis* but also at home in the *oikos*, or individual household. This domestic side to the festival of the Anthesteria is noteworthy since most civic cults were not celebrated in the home. But on this day the Anthesteria used household rituals to reposition the power of male citizens, and worshipping Dionysos meant new roles for

slaves as well as children in the *oikos*. The inclusion of children in the *Choes* marked not so much a Dionysian inversion of social roles as a shift in boundaries that marked a social transition. Physical evidence fills in what is missing from the literary and historical record. While archeological excavations in Athens have unearthed thousands of full-sized jugs (*choes*), hundreds of miniature *choes* have also been found. These smaller versions of the wine jug belonged to the children of Athenian citizens—boys mostly but girls too sometimes, judging from the images of children painted on the vessels. The toy jugs apparently marked a social coming of age for small children who made the transition out of infancy and the dependence on milk and into the larger community of Athenians who drank wine. To celebrate the occasion family members gave children miniature jugs—a smaller-scale toy replica of the three-liter jug that their parents used.¹⁷ The inclusion of slaves in the domestic festivities of the Anthesteria also inverted normal customs for drinking and dining. Normally domestic slaves labored to complete the countless mundane tasks required to run a household, such as cooking meals and serving citizen men in the dining room. But on this day slaves enjoyed the license that the worship of Dionysos provided, and became the social and ritual equals of their masters. An inscription recording a temple account from Eleusis details the accounting for the slaves' meat and wine (*IG II² 1672*; Callimachus *fr.* 178), and in the Hellenistic period this entire festival was considered a special day for slaves. Dionysos functioned as a social leveler, and slaves enjoyed the freedom of speech that was typically the hallmark of Athenian citizens.¹⁸

The Cronia, Rural Dionysia, and Anthesteria were among the most ancient of Athenian traditions. All three were linked to the growing cycle and the rhythms of agricultural life in rural Attica, and all three reflected the lived realities of slavery as the institution itself changed over time. Before Athens rose to a position of prominence in the fifth century BCE it was customary for Greeks to enslave fellow Greeks. Before Solon in the sixth century it had even been common for Athenians to enslave fellow Athenians, sometimes in a temporary form of debt-bondage but for many people that temporary financial relationship transitioned into a more permanent form of chattel slavery. In the archaic period these Greek slaves worked the land for slaveholders, and on these festival days for Dionysos and Cronos they were apparently released from their labor and allowed to celebrate alongside the free residents and citizens of Attica. As Athens changed and became more urban, so did the institution of slavery. After Solon banned the debt-bondage of citizens in the mid-sixth century, Athenians simply enslaved neighboring Greek peoples. But by the fourth century, Greeks hesitated to enslave any ethnic Greek; they instead

enslaved foreigners from other ethnic backgrounds. Aristotle argued that was “natural” for Greeks to dominate “barbarians,” just as it was natural for men to dominate women (Aristotle, *Pol.* 1.2.2–1.2.15). This was the form of slavery that became common in the culturally Greek world of the Hellenistic and Roman Eras and Early Christianity. But even as the economies of the Greek cities grew, and as the customs of slaveholding changed over the centuries, the ancient festival rhythms still remained in place. These three festivals of Cronos and Dionysos in Hellas continued to offer slaves a day of relative freedom, even into the Roman Empire of Plutarch’s day.

Athenian festivals offered slaves a very limited opportunity to experience some freedom in the social world, but judging from the sources a few slaves somehow managed to reach a more permanent status that allowed them to recline at meals on a regular basis. Literary sources record trials of known individuals who were publicly accused of assuming false identities. These people were alleged to have been slaves who posed as imposters and unlawfully lived the lives of full citizens. The former prostitute and slave Neaera, along with her daughter Phano, offer an interesting example.¹⁹ These two women, who allegedly started out in Corinth as slaves in the sex industry and ended up living as wives of Athenian citizens in the fourth century BCE, would not have been allowed to recline at meals as men did unless they were working as prostitutes. And yet their success at masquerading as citizen-wives demonstrates that skilled and intelligent slaves of either gender could conceivably pass as legitimate citizens in Greek society; these women continued to entertain their husbands’ friends and colleagues. Likewise, a certain Nicomachus, named in another fourth-century Athenian lawsuit,²⁰ was accused of not being the full Athenian citizen he claimed he was, but rather the son of a slave and potentially a slave himself.

For the ambitious in this ancient society, the boundary separating slave from free could be crossed if you knew how. Greek literature is full of fictional characters who likewise crossed (and re-crossed) that boundary from free to slave, and when lucky from slave to free: Chyrses’ daughter in *Iliad* 1, the story of Eumaeus in the *Odyssey* 15, and characters like Longus’ Chloe, Apuleius’ Lucius, and the two protagonists from the *Ephesian Tale* (Habrocomes and Anthia) who were all free individuals of high birth threatened with slavery. While the epic tradition and the Greek novel are certainly not good sources for actual lived experiences, they do give us a glimpse into the mentality of those who lived during Mediterranean antiquity. From the seventh century BCE to the second century CE slaveholding was an accepted part of the fabric of society. War, piracy, and pure greed supplied human bodies for the slave markets, and slaveholders who reclined

at their leisure relied on the labor of slaves to make their leisure possible. On a very few occasions, slaves enjoyed their masters' dining customs and on even fewer occasions some slaves managed to completely out-smart that system.

Reclining in Sparta: Slaves in the Civic Celebration of Hyacinthia

Athens was an Ionian city, but Sparta was Dorian. The social customs and festival calendars in the Dorian cities differed greatly from Athens. While Athenians over time moved away from enslaving each other and their fellow Greeks and toward the enslavement of non-Greek foreigners, slavery in Sparta meant dominating a hereditary class of people called helots. These residents of Sparta, Laconia, and neighboring Messenia were not technically chattel, but an unfree people who worked the land as slaves and produced the resources that supported the Spartan citizen body and their military way of life. Helots had no political rights, were habitually mistreated, and tortured, and during a festival called the Crypteia could be killed without fear of reprisal. While elite Spartan male citizens lived and dined communally in public messes apart from their wives and families, the helots lived in the countryside with their extended families who helped them work the land. Like slaves in other cities, Spartan helots could also support themselves and their families as artisans and craftsmen.²¹

Apollo was an important deity in Sparta and Laconia, and there is some intriguing evidence in Athenaeus (quoting the historian Polycrates) for a Spartan festival celebrating Apollo and his beloved Hyacinthus—a festival that included slaves. In myth Apollo accidentally killed Hyacinthus, but the handsome youth was revived and attained the status of a deathless hero. The Hyacinthia was celebrated for three days in the summer: the first day mourning the death of Hyacinthus featured plain and somber banquets without garlands, songs, and cakes, while the second and third days joyfully marked Hyacinthus' new position as a hero who would continue to live alongside Apollo. At this festival, foreigners mingled among the Spartan citizens, and all shared in the abundance of the god with special feast of goat meat, honey-cakes, and cheese (Athenaeus 4.139). Spartan citizens specifically invited their slaves to dine with them on these latter two days, and portable booths or shelters (*skenai*) were set up right next to the temple of Apollo and furnished with rustic wooden couches spread with blankets (Athenaeus 4.138). Like the Cronia and the Anthesteria, the Hyacinthia was an ancient agricultural festival, and perhaps had a male initiatory and pederastic aspect to it as well, evident in the emphasis on the

relationship between the older Apollo and the youth Hyacinthus.²² The inclusion of reclining slaves in the celebrations and joyful spectacles mentioned by Polycrates and Athenaeus apparently reflects a specific Spartan ideology about what it meant to be free in both the mythological past, and the festival present.

Reclining in Eleusis and Corinth: Slaves in the Worship of Demeter

These civic festivals in a two Dorian and Ionian cities of Hellas offered occasions for slaves to celebrate beside free citizens, and recline alongside them as well. But another cultic tradition gave slaves the opportunity to worship with citizens, namely the Eleusinian Mysteries. For over a thousand years, from the archaic period right through to late antiquity, generations of Greeks and Romans made the annual pilgrimage to Eleusis in Attica every fall to worship the goddess Demeter and be initiated into her mysteries.²³ The festival lasted nearly a week, and was open to anyone who spoke Greek, regardless of their civic status: male or female, Greek or foreign, free or slave. Worshippers made the pilgrimage over land from Athens to Eleusis, and once there they camped in the plain outside the sanctuary or found lodging in the town. Celebrations included preliminary individual piglet sacrifices at Phaleron (followed by roast pork on the beach), and a final evening of civic sacrifices and dancing in the forecourt of the sanctuary in Eleusis.²⁴ Inscriptional evidence records the names of many slaves who attended the festival over the years.²⁵ Travlos proposed that there was a city *prytaneion* in Eleusis that provided public dining rooms for the annual Panhellenic festival.²⁶ While there certainly were not a sufficient number of dining rooms for the thousands of worshippers to eat indoors and recline on couches, there is abundant evidence that slaves and free people ate together at this festival, possibly dining together outside under *skenai* or reclining on the ground.

Perhaps loosely related to the worship of Demeter at Eleusis was the worship of Demeter at Corinth that was observed from the fifth century BCE up through the Roman Empire. There in a Demeter sanctuary on Acrocorinth archeologists have unearthed a significant dining complex with 52 separate dining rooms that had no regular scheme for couches, and even the couches themselves were of irregular length. Although some pig bones have been found (a clear marker for the worship of Demeter), cooking pots, casseroles, carbonized wheat, and grinding stones indicating vegetable dishes were more common. The rooms held anywhere from five to nine couches, and cooking was carried out right on the floor of the dining rooms. The votive offerings excavated there, along with the temple and a sacrificial pit, suggest

that the site was well used for many centuries, especially by women.²⁷ The presence of slaves cannot be fixed at this dining complex, although slaves were present at the rites celebrated in the nearby complex at Eleusis. Given the irregularities of this sanctuary and dining complex, the rites celebrated there may have been irregular in some ways, too. If women reclined, which seems certain, perhaps slaves did, too.

Some Dining Customs in Rome

Although reclining at a meal and the symposium that followed was not originally a Greek practice, the Greeks quickly adopted it during the archaic period. During the sixth century BCE, the new Greek banquet customs spread throughout the Mediterranean, including west into Sicily and Italy, including Etruria. By the Hellenistic period dining rooms themselves underwent structural changes that resulted in the development of the formal *pi*-shaped triclinium, an arrangement that replaced the individual, movable couches with wide benches that allowed diners to recline with their heads toward the center of the common space and their feet along the edges of the room. The triclinium allowed for new forms of commensality among the Romans, who further modified Greek banquet customs by including women at the reclining meal. But slaves remained slaves, that is, mere bodies that served the needs of the ruling slaveholders.

Beyond the well-known example of the Saturnalia, a handful of other festivals and occasions celebrated in Rome perhaps provided opportunities for slaves to recline at meals.²⁸ As was the case in Greece, some of these occasions hearkened back to the rural origins of Roman power and authority. According to Livy (5.13.5–8), the Romans had observed a custom called the *lectisternium* since at least the fourth century BCE. *Lectisternia* (pl.) were symbolic banquets given in honor of the gods; the custom was adapted from the Greek communities in Italy, and *lectisternia* were celebrated at many major Roman festivals and in private homes. In a public place, most likely a temple, images of the gods were placed on or near couches that were sumptuously spread. While the gods reclined at their ease, throughout the city Romans in their homes celebrated rites and extended the conventional rules of hospitality far beyond the normal boundaries.²⁹ Doors were left ajar, all visitors were welcomed regardless of whether they were known or not, citizens set aside their personal quarrels, and prisoners were released from prison for a few days. Livy does not mention slaves, but in an atmosphere of general license it is not difficult to image that some slaves took part in the feast on an equal footing with others in the community, especially those domestic slaves whose tasks took them out of the household and into the

public sphere. As the gods reclined and relaxed, so did the other residents of Rome.

Like Livy, Cicero also lived through the political and social upheaval of the late Republic, and he too longed for the more stable, predictable Rome of bygone days. Cicero's penchant for conservatism and traditional Roman ways was put on full display in a treatise on political philosophy entitled *de Legibus*, or *On the Laws*. In this dialogue Cicero described the customs of his ideal state, which, while not accurate as an historical document of real practice, did reflect his vision of how ancestral Italian practices should be observed in late Republican Rome. Immediately following a recommendation that Romans should observe "established religious ceremonies," Cicero urged Romans to honor festivals sacred to the native gods of the Italian countryside, and to "celebrate with their slaves after their work is finished." A cycle of agricultural festivals should be "so established that they fall at annual intervals" (Cicero, *Leg.* 2.19). Nowhere does Cicero specifically mention reclining when he lists the rituals of the fathers, but his Roman audience must have understood that the reclining banquet was the traditional way to honor Roman deities. Celebrating with the slaves at the close of the harvest may have entailed reclining with the slaves, too. In a similar way the summer festival of Fors Fortuna, celebrated in Rome on June 24 at the temple of Fortuna, was popular among plebeians and slaves, who drank while they reclined on boats floating down the Tiber River.³⁰

As Rome grew and left behind its rural roots so longingly recalled by Livy and Cicero, it became a complex entity that used a hierarchical administration to govern the city, the provinces, and eventually the empire. Citizens of higher status governed, and the bodies of slaves provided the human resource that helped fuel the economy of the empire. Within the urban centers of the empire, exclusive and segregative dining clubs or *collegia* grew up during the first three centuries of the Common Era. These clubs comprised freemen and slaves functioned as dining groups that were organized around either a particular deity, or a shared trade.³¹ Such *collegia* provided both slaves and freemen a commensal community with which to socialize, especially on festival days. Inscriptions specified the ingredients necessary for communal eating and drinking, for example, bread, wine, sardines, warm water, and utensils (CIL 14.2112).³² When the *collegia* observed monthly banquets and other celebrations associated with their common deity or perhaps their patron, the freemen and slaves would probably have reclined together in a dining room, imitating the customs of the Roman upper classes.

Finally, in a dining tradition related to that of the Roman *collegia* stands the cult of Mithras, an initiatory cult imported to Rome from the eastern Mediterranean, perhaps late in the first century CE. The voluntary rites of

the Persian god Mithras attracted exclusively male followers throughout the Roman world from the first through the third centuries CE, and possibly offered initiates a form of salvation. Soldiers were frequent initiates in the rites of the Sun god Mithras, but freeman and slaves were also common members of the Mithraic communities. Men from the Roman upper classes did not often choose to become initiates of this foreign god. Groups met to worship Mithras in small, enclosed shrines or “caves” (termed “Mithraea” by scholars), and they also dined together, reclining on the wide benches that were built along around the exterior walls of the arched worship space. The mythic tradition surrounding Mithras singles him out as the “bull-slayer,” but no sacrificial altars have been excavated within Mithraea. Still, initiates reclined and ate the cult meal in the Roman manner—soldiers, freeman, and slaves alike.³³

Some Conclusions

Slaves were resources and property in the cities of the ancient Mediterranean world, available bodies whose labor kept that world going, whether they toiled in the mines, the fields, the mills, the markets, the brothels, or the homes of slaveholders. As Greek and Roman slaveholders enjoyed the privilege of reclining at meals among their peers on a regular basis, slaves worked invisibly in the background to ensure that the banquets went off without a hitch. Reclining signaled leisure, above all the leisure of the aristocracy. Even while Roman plebeians and Greek householders could choose to imitate the customs of the elite, slaves had few choices, and leisure was something they were not well acquainted with.

While all this is true, the traditional festival calendars of Greece and Rome reveal the traces—and the idealized traces (as in the case of Cicero)—of an agrarian past when life was simpler. The Hellenic Cronia, Rural Dionysia, Anthesteria, and Hyacinthia, and the Roman *lectisternia* festivals, and the festival of Fortuna and the idealized vision of Cicero—assumed a mythical, heroic, or golden age in the distant past that was free from slavery. Since slaves and slaveholders in the rural present labored side by side, they could also recline side by side. These few festivals gave slaves a day of relative freedom, and presented slaves with opportunities to recline, drink, and celebrate as though they really were free. Even when Greece and Rome both became more urban, tradition preserved the customs of the past and slaves benefited, if only a little. But other new ritual practices accompanied the urbanization of the ancient Mediterranean, and new voluntary social groups (*collegia*) opened up for urban slaves. By that time everyone understood that slaves could sometimes recline at meals. Likewise, the mystery religions of

Demeter and Mithras also opened up new possibilities for the bodies of slaves, bodies that slaveholders could not always control. In the voluntary initiatory cults slaves reclined their bodies on couches or at east on the ground, enjoyed cult meals, and learned esoteric knowledge that brought them new and unimagined salvation. This too was a part of the everyday landscape of slavery in the first centuries of the Common Era.

Notes

1. For recent collections of essays on the Greek and Roman symposia prior to Christianity see Murray, *Symptotica*, and Slater, *Dining*.
2. Glancy, *Slavery*, 38; 152–156. I take as my starting point for this paper Glancy's call to move forward with scholarship, p. 156: "Precisely that identification of slaves as bodies, then, should be the starting place for further investigation of the ideological and social impact of a slaveholding culture on the men and women who comprised the membership of the ancient Christian body." As a Classicist who studies Athens I look to earlier evidence for slaveholding culture, above all the practices that continued to exist during the formative years of Christianity.
3. Murray, "Symptotic History," 5–7.
4. Evans, "Feast, Citizens, and Cultic Democracy," 4–10.
5. *IG I 2* 280. On the dining spaces in the Propylaea see Travlos, *Pictorial Dictionary*, 487; for the dining rooms in the Pompeion: Travlos, *Pictorial Dictionary*, 477–478. For a translation of the Parthenon inventories see Fornara, *Archaic Times*, no. 141. Scholars are divided as to what happened in the civic dining room called the Tholos. Following Travlos some propose that the round building was furnished with couches for civic officials to recline on, while others argue that the *prytaneis* must have sat when they dined in the Tholos, since reclining signaled the aristocracy and the Tholos was the hearth of the democratic state. On the reconstruction of 25 couches for the 50 *prytaneis* in the Tholos see Travlos, *Pictorial Dictionary*, 553–555; for an opposing viewpoint see Cooper and Morris, "Dining in Round Buildings," 75–79.
6. Parker, *Polytheism*, 169.
7. Philochorus, *FGH* 328, cf. 97, as cited by Macrobius in the 5th cent CE.
8. See Aristophanes, *Nub.* 397; cf. Demosthenes 24.6.
9. *Mor.* 1098b.
10. Parke, *Festivals*, 29–30; Parker, *Polytheism*, 202 and 475; Garlan, *Slavery* 130 and 198.
11. Dionysos was the god of theater, and theater had deeply religious roots. Athenians worshipped Dionysos with theatrical performances three times a year: the rural Dionysia and the Lenaia were celebrated during the dead of winter, and the season of dramatic festivals culminated with the city Dionysia in the spring. The three festivals were evenly spaced over four consecutive months. Pickard-Cambridge, *Dramatic Festivals*; Parker, *Polytheism*, 316–321.

12. Pickard-Cambridge, *Dramatic Festivals* 42–56. For a sixth-century image of Dionysian phallos poles, see Parker, *Polytheism*, 320, fig. 22.
13. Plutarch, *Mor.* 527d; Plutarch also noted that by his time in the late first century CE what had once been a simple rural festival become an occasion for empty displays of wealth and finery.
14. All three of the canonical Athenian playwrights depict slave-women on the stage, and these roles were notably played free by male actors: e.g., Aeschylus wrote about the enslaved princess Cassandra in the *Oresteia*, and Sophocles imagined Electra's servitude in the household of Aegisthus. Euripides was especially drawn to the plight of enslaved women: consider Hecuba, Andromache, and the chorus of Trojan Women.
15. On the Anthesteria see Parker, *Polytheism*, 290–316; Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 259; Parke, *Festivals*, 105–119.
16. Parker, *Polytheism*, 293; Hamilton, *Choes*, 115 ff.
17. What may be most curious from our modern point of view is the age of the children in this *rite de passage* that led the child into the company of wine-drinkers in Athens: the children on the miniature jugs are barely more than toddlers, and certainly no older than four or five. The little *choes* jugs depict children at play, amusing themselves with dice, tops, and hoops.
18. Parker, *Polytheism*, 294, and especially accompanying note 22.
19. Pseudo-Demosthenes 59 [*Neaer.*].
20. Lysias 30 [*Against Nicomachus*].
21. Garland, *Slavery*, 153–155; 93–98; Cartledge, “The Helots,” 76–86.
22. For an interesting structuralist reading of the Hyacinthia see Bruit, “The Meal at the Hyakinthia,” 163–168.
23. Parker, *Polytheism*, 169–170, and 327–368; Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 285–290; Mylonas, *Eleusis*, chapter 9.
24. Evans, “Sanctuaries,” 239–244.
25. Clinton, *Inscriptions on Stone*; Parker, *Polytheism*, 170, with note 55.
26. Bookidis, “Ritual Dining,” 87, with note 2.
27. Bookidis, “Ritual Dining,” 86–93.
28. See Standhartinger, “The Saturnalia in Greco-Roman Culture,” chapter 11 of the current volume.
29. On the *lectisternia* see Beard, North, and Price, *Religions*, 1.263.
30. Scullard, *Festivals*, 155–156; Donahue, “Toward a Typology,” 431.
31. Donahue, “Toward a Typology,” 432. For evidence of slaves in Roman *collegia* Donahue cites *CIL* 6.10237 (433, note 35). *Collegia* are just one of the different types of urban meal associations discussed in detail in Richard Ascough's paper in chapter four of the current volume (“Social and Political Characteristics of Greco-Roman Association Meals”). While Ascough does not discuss reclining slaves, he does note the transgressive aspect of the association meal, which encouraged people from different social backgrounds to come together and relate over the meal, if only temporarily.
32. Inscription quoted from Donahue, “Toward a Typology,” 432.
33. On Mithraism, see Beck, *Beck on Mithraism*.

CHAPTER 10

The Sex Trade and Slavery at Meals

Carly Daniel-Hughes

In this chapter I outline the contours of the sex trade in the ancient Greek and Roman worlds in order to demonstrate that it, and the institution of slavery of which it was a part, were fundamental to ancient meal culture. The meal relied on slave labor not only for executing the banquet—which in elite households could prove quite an elaborate affair¹—but also for entertaining the guests, and in so doing, reflecting back the status and prestige of the banquet host and his or her guests. The relationship, then, between slavery and the sex trade at the meal circulates around the notion that the meal should enhance the leisure (*otium*) of the guests.² In this context the sexual availability, at least potentially, of those serving and performing at the meal is tied directly to the logic of slavery in which slaves are commodities to be used by others.

The bulk of my discussion traces the historical context of this connection, and does so by addressing the sex trade generally. My analysis in the final sections of the chapter is directed toward a richer phenomenology of the meal, one that takes into account participants otherwise marginalized in the study of meals in the Roman world.³ While classical Greek antecedents are discussed, the chapter is most interested in exploring this issue in the context of dining in the Roman Imperial period. Ultimately, I demonstrate that at Roman *convivia* guests would expect to encounter enslaved women and men whose role was either wholly or partially to be on display sexually, and whose job was to arouse and titillate those, particularly men, in attendance, thereby contributing to the meal as a scene of male pleasure.

The Sex Trade and Slavery in Greece and Rome

The ancient sex trade refers to the exchange of material goods, social benefits, or money for sexual intercourse or other sexual acts. This broad definition indicates the difficulty with delineating the boundaries of the ancient sex trade. While the exchange of money for sex might easily be categorized as part of it, the term should include arrangements where women and men made themselves sexually available to other people in return for various kinds of support.⁴ A varied commercial enterprise, then, this ancient trade relied not only on the bodily labor of male and female prostitutes and the demands of their clients, but also on the economic interests of others involved in this exchange, such as slave-masters, fathers, mothers, tavern owners, and pimps (*pornoboskos*, “whore-pasturer” or *leno*, “pimp”).⁵ Often the trade involved slaves at various levels: for instance, a male slave might be a prostitute or he might visit a prostitute. He might be a pimp and prostitute fellow slaves for his master or mistress. A female slave likewise might act as a pimp by selling the services of her fellow slaves. On the whole, the term sex trade is a better descriptor of this ancient phenomenon because it prohibits us from keeping a partial view of a structural economic practice that is focused solely on the actions of prostitutes.

Across the classical Greek and into the imperial Roman period, the Mediterranean sex trade was deeply tied to the institution of slavery. In fact, there is no meaningful distinction between slavery and sex work in these ancient contexts, most especially, I argue, in the Roman Empire. The sex trade was a product of the logic of slavery that held certain persons to be commodified bodies. Thus, it is not surprising that most, if not all, sex workers in the ancient Mediterranean were enslaved.⁶ Jennifer Glancy has illustrated that slavery in ancient Rome rendered the slave a bodily thing, a *soma*, to be utilized to suit the needs of his or her master.⁷ The master’s right to maintain control over the slave as a *soma* rendered the slave’s body exploitable in myriad ways. A master or mistress could justify total sexual access to a slave precisely because the slave’s body was his or her property, as well as his or her commodity to exchange.

Carolyn Osiek has suggested that this logic extended to masters’ sexual rights over their slaves: male and female slaves’ sexual availability was taken for granted.⁸ This presumptive right extended to selling sexual access to slaves, even placing them in brothels.⁹ Interestingly, however, Thomas McGinn has noted that some slaveholders took special precautions to ensure that the slaves they sold were not forced into prostitution. In bills of sale they attached a *ne serva prostituatur* clause that expressly forbade this practice. McGinn, however, sees this clause as most likely reflecting the interests

of the slave-owners. Indeed, the institution of slavery was structured to protect their needs; perhaps the clause aimed to protect the sexual integrity of the owner's entire household.¹⁰ This fact, then, reminds us that the slave, as property, was understood to be a potential status marker for his or her owner. Because the slave was constituted as a *soma*, a body that was possessed by his or her owner, masters or mistresses could also insist upon their right to oversee a slave's fertility. This right extended even to selling a female's slaves as wet-nurses, or using them as such for other children (slave and free) within the household.¹¹

Thus the lives of ancient sex workers were constituted by the harsh realities of ancient slavery. Prostitutes, as with slaves generally, were captives from war, exposed and unwanted children, or other disenfranchised persons. They turned to prostitution because they were either compelled or forced to by their masters, or out of financial insecurity.¹² Rebecca Flemming has argued that contemporary feminist debates about prostitution as a "legitimate" mode of work or as a "rational" choice are not effective for explicating the nature of the sex trade in the Roman world precisely because the slave and the prostitute were more often than not one and the same.¹³ In a similar vein, David Halperin has argued that in Athens, prostitutes were constituted in Greek democratic discourse as the opposite of the Athenian citizen: their bodies were violable by all, where the citizen's body was violable by none.¹⁴ For Halperin, Athenian brothels served to extend the boundaries of Greek democracy to include the men from poorer classes in the category of citizens. He writes: "The disenfranchisement of male prostitutes and the cheap provision of female prostitutes beg to be seen together . . . to promote a new collective image of the citizen body as masculine and assertive . . . as perpetually on the side of a series of hierarchical and roughly congruent distinctions in status: master versus slave, free versus unfree."¹⁵ The common brothel worker in classical Athens, whether male or female, was enslaved and very often a foreigner, whose marginal status meant that his or her life was precarious and dangerous.¹⁶

Ancient prostitutes—that is, slaves who subsisted largely by means of sex work—plied their trade in various contexts: streets and city walls, theaters, taverns, baths, and brothels.¹⁷ Another venue where sex workers commonly appeared was of course the *convivium*, which I discuss in greater detail at the end of the chapter. It is important to note here, though, that the young male slaves called *delicati*, who served as sexual "pets" of their masters, were commonly used as wine-bearers during meals. These "delicate boys" enjoyed more material comfort than the unfortunate brothel slaves did, yet they shared with the common prostitute the fact that their survival depended on their sexual availability and the whims of their masters.¹⁸

Roman imperial authors indicate that the city brothel was a terrifying and gruesome place—a fact borne out in the archeological record. For instance, the famous brothel from Pompeii featured small cramped *cellae* with stone benches where the prostitutes would serve clients; painted over the *cellae* doors were a series of erotic scenes that imagine the lovers in much more opulent settings than the austere environs of the prostitute's cell. Roman authors describe these places as filthy and sinking,¹⁹ though as businesses they were often considered a “controlled site of sexual availability.”²⁰ McGinn has argued that there is no evidence suggesting that the brothel was relegated to certain parts of Roman cities, or that the sex trade was controlled through zoning. These businesses appear to have been ubiquitous in the Roman Empire, but they are attested in archeological records for classical Athens and Hellenistic Greek cities as well.²¹

The most horrifying part of brothel life appears to have been working under an avaricious *leno*, a pimp. In comedies and satires throughout the Greek and Roman periods, the *leno* or *pornoboskos* is presented as greedy and conniving. Indeed, a common plot twist in comedic and romance literature imagines the courtesan or, perhaps worse, a virgin, becoming victim to the avarice of a horrid *pornoboskos*.²² Thus Anthia, the heroine of Xenophon's *Ephesian Tale*, is humiliated by her cruel master, her pimp:

... the brothel-keeper who had bought Anthia forced her after awhile to exhibit herself in front of his establishment. So he dressed her in a beautiful costume, loaded her with gold, and brought her to take her position in front of the brothel door.²³

In this romantic tale the heroine of the upper class is rescued before it is too late and her virginity is spoiled. Here the cruel brothel-keeper even helps her to recover from love-sickness! In reality, however, a slave had little negotiating power with his or her *leno*. The *leno* could fix the price of the prostitute, and keep the majority of his or her income.²⁴ Of course, some women and men in Rome may have been able to sell their trade on the streets, in bath-houses and taverns—namely outside the confines of the brothel—and even apart from the oversight of an oppressive *leno*.²⁵

Status and Marginality: Placing Prostitutes in the Roman Empire

In the classical Greek period, there may be evidence of independent women, the courtesans, or *hetairai*, who were not enslaved and were differentiated socially from low-class *pornai*. In *Courtesans and Fishcakes*, James Davidson

argues that the brothel worker, the courtesan's "antithesis," was paid cash for sex, an act that rendered her and her vulgar services explicitly an economic commodity, a transaction. The courtesan (*hetaira*), on the other hand, was seen as a "companion." She was never paid for sex. The successful courtesan, Davidson argues, perfected this careful negotiation precisely because the distance between the two classes of women was never absolute—which raises a question about the rhetorical nature of these two epithets. Thus, while Davidson suggests that there were social and financial distinctions between these categories of women in classical Greece, he admits that the terms were rhetorically flexible: "The very act of naming was an important part of policing women and women's sexuality."²⁶ Such a conclusion suggests that courtesan and prostitute, while rhetorically demarcated as antitheses in Attic literature, in fact, reflected a spectrum of social positions—from relative economic freedom to enslavement—which a (non-Greek) woman, operating outside the confines of a citizen marriage, might occupy.²⁷

In the Roman world, however, the figure of the courtesan was a literary fantasy that populated the plays, satires, and dialogues. It has been argued, convincingly, that this figure bears no resemblance to the social realities of female sex workers, particularly in the Roman Empire. Take the bawdy courtesans featured in Athenaeus' *Learned Banquetters* who serve as topics for discussion by male interlocutors. In this sympotic dialogue, the courtesan, Laura McClure explains, features as a topic of debate associated with classical texts and narratives; she, ultimately, appears "fragmented and fetishized into a series of names, jokes, and monuments."²⁸ The courtesan, then, is a type character associated with the archaic past of classical Athens, a means for writers like Athenaeus, who preserve her memory, to reflect on "cultural identity, *paideia*, and tradition" in view of "the political and social challenges of Greeks living in the Roman Empire."²⁹

In fact, in the Roman Empire the terms courtesan and *porne* effectively collapse, rendering them near-synonyms in Greek. Such semantic slippage suggests, according to McClure, that women engaged in the sex trade were broadly understood as socially marginalized, often united by their presumptive "foreign" or transient status.³⁰ Among Latin writers of this period, in fact, we do not find real distinctions made between categories of sex workers. Yet terms in Latin for female sex workers abound, particularly in satire and epigram.³¹ The great number of pejorative descriptors for sex workers, particularly female ones, suggests that they were recognized as a permanent fixture of city life. Some terms refer to the specific means by which a prostitute advertised her services, as J. N. Adams explains: "*prostibulum*, lit. 'one who is in front of the *stabulum*, inn.'"³² Other terms were more derogatory, such as *lupus femina*, "she-wolf," indicating the view of a female prostitute

as rapacious.³³ In keeping with this representation, the brothel itself often earned the clever title *lupanaria*, “den of she-wolves.”³⁴

The most common Latin terms for sex workers, however, were *meretrix* and *scrotum*, which are equivalent to the Greek term *porne*. *Scrotum* is a more derogatory and moralizing synonym for *meretrix* and is related to the word for leather or hide. This term could be applied to male and female prostitutes alike, and may be an insulting reference to genitalia.³⁵ The fact that a male prostitute would have been called *scrotum*, and never *meretrix*, suggests that male prostitutes were often despised, perhaps even more so than their female counterparts. Their denigrated status would be the natural result of Roman gender ideology that cast true men as *vir* whose bodily integrity was inviolable.³⁶ That is, a true man was figured as an “impenetrable penetrator,” who had the legal and social advantages necessary to guard against bodily intrusions that were the common lot of slaves. *Meretrix* and *scrotum* do not ostensibly refer to different categories of sex-workers, but rather point to the denigrated status of those who were engaged in the sex trade.

Thus we find a broad concern in Latin sources to distinguish Roman women and men as persons who do not suffer bodily degradation, particularly sexual degradation, which was cast as the burden of servitude. These attempts to differentiate female prostitutes from Roman matrons in Latin sources reflect a desire to disenfranchise certain women from patrilineal households.³⁷ In this way, a prostitute’s offspring could not claim legitimate status and retain the rights that attended recognition by a citizen father, as a matron’s child could. We can imagine that a prostitute’s children would have been sold into slavery, exposed, or been relinquished to a worse fate.³⁸ (Authors commonly express that exposed children became slave prostitutes).³⁹ The distinction between these groups of women was likewise regulated through Roman civic and religious life: matrons were historically devotees of the once-famous cult to *Pudicitia*, modesty, whereas prostitutes participated in the Floralia or the Veneralia, festivities that celebrated fertility and erotic love.⁴⁰

Parsing prostitutes from matrons, or male prostitutes from freeborn or freed boys, also played out in Roman discussions of proper dress and adornment. In the Roman *Digest* we find the suggestion that matrons ought to dress in ways that visually distinguish them from prostitutes.⁴¹ This comment is a prescriptive attempt to mark the prostitute as a woman without *dignitas*, not deserving respect, seeming to elevate the matron in ways that would in fact diminish her relative freedom of movement. In other words, the *Digest* warns: do not walk attracting suspicions like a common whore—a woman who ranks below even a slave—or you will be treated like one.⁴² Roman moralists in the Empire often complained that women no longer observed proper dress practice that would visually demarcate them.⁴³ Such

statements indicate not only that women's clothing practice was more fluid than Latin moralists would have liked, but also that during the Roman Empire women's accumulation of wealth, a potential threat to men's domestic authority, could be manifest in their adornment.⁴⁴ Not surprisingly, Roman orators and historians often ascribe the term *meretrix*, or its synonyms, to high-standing women whom they wish to undermine.

Likewise, sexual slander could be used to instill fear in men about their masculinity and status.⁴⁵ It stands to reason that we also find warnings to young men about their garb; they are discouraged from donning soft clothing, curling their hair, and particularly depilating their bodies to secure smooth skin.⁴⁶ John Pollini has suggested that such precautions reflect the adornment of young sexually available slave boys, the *delicati*. Between the ages of 12 and 17, these pretty boys would be depilated, painted with makeup, handsomely dressed, and marked with a distinctive "feminized" hairstyle, featuring curled hair framing the face and falling down the neck.⁴⁷ While a feminine appearance might be understood to render "acceptable" the sexual pleasure a Roman man took from this slave boy, Pollini suggests that the costume also distinguished the sexually available slave from free-born boys who might be subject to the sexual desires of Roman men.⁴⁸

The concern to identify slave boys as sexual outlets, thereby preserving the dignity of Roman boys, reminds us that sex work was an occupational possibility for anyone, male or female, who did not enjoy the legal privileges of free or freed status. Enslaved people were cast as sexually available precisely because they were seen as bodies to be used for the pleasure (*voluptas*) of others, a possibility to be exploited by their masters in various "leisurely" contexts: baths, taverns, theaters, banquets, and the like. For this reason prostitutes were readily coupled with the performers, actors, and gladiators (who were also likely enslaved persons), and were seen with them as being skilled in artifice and deceit.⁴⁹ In Roman comedy and invective, this link made these "performers" at once the locus of desire and disgust, and in Roman law, it translated them into persons without reputation, *infames*.⁵⁰ Thomas McGinn has shown that actors and gladiators, like those working in the sex trade, were barred from a number of social privileges. These included participation in particular cults, access to the courts, and in the case of women, marrying a citizen, or in the case of men, holding public office.⁵¹

One final point, however, should be noted: the real possibility of manumission. In the course of his or her lifetime, a slave might be elevated from the status of enslaved to that of a freed person.⁵² This possibility of social advancement likely belonged to cherished and favorite domestic slaves, including the *delicati*. However, this social advantage was not guaranteed, and it was gained because the slave found him or herself in constant contact

with his or her master, with increased exposure to “brutality and indignities” as a result.⁵³ Public humiliation, whipping, mutilation, and even murder feature in Roman sources as the possible lot of the unfortunate slave who draws a master’s ire.⁵⁴

The Sex Trade and Erotic Pleasure at the Meal

Dining played a central role in all facets of ancient life, and the banquet was the “key social event” for those living in ancient Greece and Rome.⁵⁵ Artistic representations place a variety of sexually available slaves in these contexts: young girls and boys who dance and play the flute, and often, sweet boys, scantily clad or nude, who pour wine and attend the reclining symposiasts. Greek and Latin literature suggests the presence of entertainers at the meal, including singers, dancers, jugglers, and various kinds of acrobatic performers.⁵⁶ Sources indicate that in the Greek classical period, musicians, such as the “flute-girl” (*auletris*), were drawn from the most servile classes, very often non-Greek slaves.⁵⁷ In the Roman world, entertainment was the responsibility of the host. He would have relied on his slaves to meet this need at banquets.⁵⁸ Elaborate kinds of entertainment would be the prerogative of wealthier hosts, reflecting a general cultural ideal in which entertainment, in terms of food, conversation, and various types of performances, would mark a successful meal.

Thus, we should understand the presence of sexually titillating entertainers in the broader context of slaves who attended the meal. Elaborate feasts, for instance, might feature slaves whose duties varied from handling and seating the guests, to serving food, serving wine, cleaning—in short, seeing to the enjoyment of attendees. Part of the pleasure of the guests, Matthew Roller has noted, included the hope of sex, a point to which I will return.

In practice, of course, the form of the meal was always adapted to meet the particular needs of the group and the occasion. Our literary and artistic representations predominantly focus on elite banquets in private, domestic settings rather than what were likely customary occasions enjoyed by elites and nonelites alike, that is, funerary and marital banquets as well as religious and civic banquets.⁵⁹ Given the wide variety of meals and settings, the attendance of hired prostitutes and entertainers would not always be anticipated. At cultic meals—that is, meals held at a particular temple for select devotees—reclining guests might be visually stimulated by slaves of the cult. These attractive, feminine boys were sometimes made priestly assistants and sacrificial attendants of particular cults based on the notion that the gods appreciated beauty.⁶⁰ Ultimately, however, it is at domestic banquets that we find greater attention to the sexual display of slaves and

performers so that even when sexual encounters with them are discouraged, say, at a serious and austere philosophical symposium (idealized in Plato's *Symposium* and also in Plutarch's *Banquet of the Seven Sages* or Philo's description of the simple meal of the *Therapeutae*), the absence of these enjoyments is highlighted.

Thus, domestic banquets underscored the sexual privileges of meal guests in ways that were sustained by the logic of slavery (i.e., that those serving were available "bodies" for male enjoyment). Slaves in attendance were cast as part of the "fixtures" that make a good banquet, like luxurious pillows or good wine.⁶¹ That slaves were there for pleasure was also highlighted by the physical layout of the meal setting, the *triclinia*, or "three-couched" dining room. As Smith and Klinghardt demonstrate, the status of the various persons at the meals was essential to the display of the rights and responsibilities of those in attendance. The physical space of the dining room in which the meal (*deipnon*) and then ensuing symposium (or *convivium*) took place established and maintained the status, obligations, and privileges of all in attendance. While guests, both male and female, reclined, slaves would not sit at all, or perhaps sit only if invited.⁶² Silence, too, was expected of attending slaves. They were to be seen and enjoyed, in no way that detracted from the interests of the guests and host.⁶³ Thus, in artistic images of Greek and Roman banquet scenes, we find the slave standing in attendance near the guests' couches.⁶⁴ The posture was telling, for those who reclined were able to enjoy all the services of the slaves and entertainers in attendance, being fed and plied with drink, regaled with bawdy or edifying discourses, serenaded, or sexually titillated.⁶⁵

While female slaves would appear in a variety of contexts during the meal, it was the male cupbearers who were most associated with drawing the sexual attention of reclining guests.⁶⁶ These youthful boys, the *delicati*, were often the prized possessions of their masters. Outfitted, as we have seen, in feminine garb and make-up, they were props that indicated their masters' status. For this reason, a wealthy host would populate his meal with such charming boys.⁶⁷ In his treatise *De vita contemplativa*, Philo describes these youths and makes plain their servile status, writing:

Those serving [at the banquet] are slaves of the most comely form and beauty, so that one might think they have come not so much to serve as to please the eyes of their beholders by their very presence. Some of them who are still only boys pour wine, while older boys carry water, [the latter] having been washed and smoothly rubbed [with unguents and] with their faces smeared with cosmetics, their lower eyelids painted, and the hair of their head nicely plaited in some way being tightly bound up.⁶⁸

These boys, then, served to visually enhance the meal scene, while pouring wine for those in attendance. The cupbearer was a coveted object of affection; his presence at the meal was often a site of competition among the male diners. Indeed, John D'Arms suggests that these attractive wine-waiters might be barred from flirting with or soliciting the advances of those in attendance, suggesting that their presence at the meal ultimately aimed to accentuate the prestige of the host.⁶⁹

In the Roman view the meal was a space in which men—and women—reclined together, drank wine, and shared conversation. These components combined to render the meal intimate and erotically charged (potentially even unsettling). The presence of beautiful and alluring slaves, cupbearers along with female counterparts, particularly entertainers and musicians, enhanced that charge. Yet here it is important to note the distinction between the intensifying of the erotic nature of the meal, and the realization of sexual encounter at the event. The male diner who aggressively pursues sex or oversteps social mores, particularly social hierarchies, by making advances toward another diner's wife, or an attending slave, is the plot of comic scenes. Artistic and material evidence suggest, according to Matthew Roller, that the dining room was rejected as a space for "overt sexual activity."⁷⁰ Desire was aroused in the meal, and if it was realized, the encounter took place in a *cubiculum*, a bedchamber. Thus Seneca writing about the youthful cupbearers in attendance at banquets bemoans, "I pass over the flocks of luckless boys, whom other physical abuses of the bed chamber await after the banquet is over."⁷¹ It seems likely that the slave master alone retained that privilege, and thus, slave boys at the meal served ultimately as his status symbols, just as the meal itself revealed to his clients and peers the extent of his power and success.⁷²

Conclusion

This treatment of the sex trade and slavery at the meal reveals that dining room slaves, such the beautiful boyish cupbearer, or dancers and flute players of both sexes, were featured as sexually available (at least potentially) to those in attendance at a *convivium*. Their presumptive availability, even if not realized by the diners, participated in the logic of slavery, which cast slaves as "human props," or bodies to be used for another's enjoyment.⁷³ In other words, the sexual display of slaves at the meal was an extension of slavery in the context of meal culture. Their presence enhanced the erotic nature of the meal setting, which rendered it a space of male pleasure.

My conclusion, it should be noted, raises questions about literary representations of meal scenes in Roman comedy, elegiac poetry, and the satires

and dialogues of the Second Sophistic, in which female courtesans cunningly ply their trade at the banquet.⁷⁴ These writings leave the impression that young, independent women appeared commonly in the dining rooms of the Roman elite. In fact, scholars have read these with a view to understanding the sex trade and of slavery in the Roman world generally, and as salient to the social realities of women and men in the meal.⁷⁵ What I have argued differs from this perspective and claims, instead, that those entertaining the guests at the meal, whether male cupbearers or musicians and dancers of both sexes, were enslaved persons whose job was to contribute to the pleasure of the guests. Further, our sources suggest that male winebearers were the coveted objects of affection in the Roman meal, and not, as these fictional accounts imply, the female prostitute.

This reading raises questions about why courtesans at meals figure prominently in Roman comedic and satirical texts. Chapter 14 will pick up on this question by arguing that these fictional meals possesses valuable information about the power dynamics inherent in Roman dining culture. While these sources do not point simply to the social realities of prostitutes and slaves, they nonetheless point out tensions bonding and boundaries in the meal. Imagining the courtesan and the slave at the meal, in fact, served some satirists especially well as an occasion for social critique regarding Roman conceptions of status and subjectivity, reminding us that dining was symbolically rich practice whose meanings could resonate beyond the *triclinium*.

Notes

1. For a discussion of entertainment at meals, see Jones, "Dinner Theater."
2. Roller, *Dining Posture*, 16.
3. There are limited studies of slaves in the context of the meal; notable exceptions are D'Arms, "Slaves at Roman *Convivia*," and Pollini, "Slave Boys," whose discussions I rely on here.
4. McClure, *Courtesans at Table*, 8.
5. Flemming, "*Quae Corpore Quaestum Facit*," 50.
6. This fact applies even to the courtesans of classical Athens; see Davidson, *Courtesans and Fishcakes*, 105.
7. Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, 10.
8. Osiek, "Female Slaves," 262–264.
9. On the inherent connections between slaves and prostitutes, see Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, 50–57.
10. McGinn, *Prostitution, Sexuality, and the Law*, 312–313.
11. Osiek, "Female Slaves," 260.
12. Flemming, "*Quae Corpore Quaestum Facit*," 42.

13. Flemming, "Quae Corpore Quaestum Facit," 59; cf. Cohick, *Women in the World of the Earliest Christians*, 268–269.
14. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, 93–95. For a similar reading of class, gender, and sexual status in the Roman period, see Walters, "Invading the Roman Body," 29–46.
15. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, 103.
16. Davidson, *Courtesans and Fishcakes*, 78–91.
17. Flemming, "Quae Corpore Quaestum Facit," 46–47; Cohick, *Women in the World of the Earliest Christians*, 270.
18. See D'Arms, "Slaves at Roman *Convivia*," 179.
19. For instance, Juvenal, *Sat.* 6.121–132. "Assuming night-cowl, and attended by a single maid, she (Eppia) issued forth; then, having concealed her raven locks under a light-coloured peruque, she took her place in a brothel reeking with long-used coverlets. Entering an empty cell reserved for herself, she there took her stand, under the feigned name of Lycisca, her nipples bare and gilded, and exposed to view the womb that bore thee, O nobly-born Britannicus!"
20. Flemming, "Quae Corpore Quaestum Facit," 45.
21. McGinn, "Zoning Shames in the Roman City," 161–176; on Greece, see Davidson, *Courtesans and Fishcakes*, 83–91.
22. For example, in Plautus' *Rudens* and *Poenulus*, women are rescued by their long-lost fathers before their sale; see the discussion of this motif of the *pseudomatrix* in Rei, "Villians, Wives, and Slaves," 92–108.
23. Translation from Reardon, *Collected Greek Novels*, 163.
24. Flemming, "Quae Corpore Quaestum Facit," 43.
25. Flemming, "Quae Corpore Quaestum Facit," 46–47.
26. In response, Leslie Kurke ("Inventing the *Hetaira*") offers an interesting caveat that aims to contextualize the emergence of the courtesan in Greek literature, particularly literature that deals with the symposium. She suggests that courtesan and *porne* are discursive constructs. They do not construct themselves as participants in gift exchange (as Davidson implies), but are constituted through a discourse that serves the political needs of elite male symposiasts. The terms function along with other dichotomies, metal versus money, to demarcate the elite space of the symposia from the public space of the agora. These discursive categories work to minimize space between those sharing in the symposium in that they suggest that money, the grubby exchange of goods in the markets, has no place in the symposium of friends. See also the summary by McClure, *Courtesans at Table*, 11–18.
27. McClure, *Courtesans at Table*, 18.
28. McClure, *Courtesans at Table*, 30.
29. McClure, *Courtesans at Table*, 32.
30. McClure, *Courtesans at Table*, 25.
31. Adams, "Words for 'Prostitute,'" 335.
32. Adams, "Words for 'Prostitute,'" 330.
33. Adams, "Words for 'Prostitute,'" 333.

34. Flemming, "Quae Corpore Quaestum Facit," 45.
35. Adams, "Words for 'Prostitute,'" 322.
36. Walters, "Invading the Roman Body," 29–43.
37. Flemming, "Quae Corpore Quaestum Facit," 57; cf. McClure, *Courtesans at Table*, 108.
38. For instance, a pregnant courtesan in Lucian's *Dial. Mer.* 2 considers exposing her child if it is a girl; on the exposure of children in the ancient world, see Harris, "Child-Exposure in the Roman Empire."
39. See, for example, Tertullian *Apol.* 9.
40. On the cult of *Pudicitia*, see Langlands, *Sexual Morality*, 44–49; on the rites associated with prostitutes, Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, 57 (who cites Pomeroy).
41. See *Dig.* 47.10.15.15.
42. While Roman sources indicate that prostitutes wear the toga, in practice, their uniform likely varied. Olson ("Matrona and Whore," 196) has suggested that the term '*togata*' figures in Latin sources not as an indicator of what female prostitutes in fact wore, but of their character. The term as a kind of moral indicator may in fact reflect an earlier practice when these women followed a strict dress code.
43. See the discussion of Seneca the Elder in Olson, "Matrona and Whore," 199.
44. See, for instance, the discussion in Batten, "Neither Gold Nor Braided Hair."
45. The sexual licentiousness of depraved Emperors, for instance, is a constant theme in Suetonius' Lives of the Caesars; see his claims about Caligula's sexual dalliances, *Calig.* 36. In Suetonius, such tales always undermine the efficacy of the Caesar's governance. This strategy is also a favorite of Cicero's when attacking opponents; see, for example, his invective against Catiline in *Cicero Cat.* 2.25. Marsha McCoy demonstrates that Cicero uses similar invective techniques against women as well; see "The Politics of Prostitution," 182–184; cf. Langlands *Sexual Morality in Ancient Rome*, especially, 281–318.
46. Williams, *Roman Homosexuality*, 127–132.
47. Pollini, "Slave Boys," 152–156.
48. Pollini, "Slave Boys," 156, n 54.
49. Edwards, "Unspeakable Professions," 66–95.
50. Cf. Duncan, "Infamous Performers," 252–273.
51. McGinn, *Prostitution, Sexuality, and the Law*, 21–69.
52. Cohick, *Women in the World of the Earliest Christians*, 263–264.
53. D'Arms, "Slaves at Roman *Convivia*," 179.
54. For examples of cruel punishment, see D'Arms, "Slaves at Roman *Convivia*," 175.
55. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 13–14.
56. See Jones, "Dinner Theater," 190.
57. Davidson, *Courtesans and Fishcakes*, 82; cf. McClure, *Courtesans at Table*, 21–22.
58. Jones, "Dinner Theater," 197.

59. On this point see Wilkins, "Land and Sea," 370–371.
60. Pollini, "Slave Boys," 159–161.
61. Roller, "Horizontal Women," 381.
62. See, for example, Petronius *Sat.* 70.10–13. In this scene, Trimalchio invites the slaves to sit with the guests at his luxurious banquet; however, given Trimalchio's rather suspect behaviors (he is a kind of undignified *nouveaux riche*), this action might reveal the strangeness of such an "equalizing" move; see the discussion in Roller, "Horizontal Women," 384.
63. D'Arms, "Slaves at Roman *Convivia*," 171.
64. Dunbabin notes that this motif appears with more frequency in the art of late antiquity; see her treatment in "The Waiting Servant."
65. Roller, "Horizontal Women," 380.
66. D'Arms, "Slaves at Roman *Convivia*," 173.
67. D'Arms, "Slaves at Roman *Convivia*," 173–174.
68. Cited in Pollini, "Slave Boys," 155; Philo, *Contempl.* 50–2.
69. D'Arms, "Slaves at Roman *Convivia*," 173 and 175–176.
70. Roller, *Dining Posture*, 145.
71. Cited in Pollini, "Slave Boys," 156–157; *Ep.* 95.24.
72. On entertainment at meals reflecting the status of the host, cf. Jones, "Dinner Theater," 197.
73. D'Arms, "Slaves at Roman *Convivia*," 171.
74. For instance, Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 12.554c; Lucian, *Dial. meretr.* 3; cf. McClure, *Courtesans at Table*, 122–123.
75. On prostitution generally, see Herter, "Die Soziologie der Antiken Prostitution." For discussions of courtesans at the meal, see Corley, *Public Women, Private Meals* and more recently, James, "A Courtesan's Choreography."

CHAPTER 11

The Saturnalia in Greco-Roman Culture

Angela Standhartinger

Luke 12:37 “Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them.” (NRSV)

Luke 17:7 “Who among you would say to your slave who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field, ‘Come here at once and take your place at the table’? 17:8 Would you not rather say to him, ‘Prepare supper for me, put on your apron and serve me while I eat and drink; later you may eat and drink’?” (NRSV)

These two parables in Luke describe the opposite behavior of masters toward their slaves. The first slave-owner invites the loyal slaves to sit down to eat and serves them himself. In contrast, the argument of the second parable expects that a slave-owner would force his only slave to do all the kitchen-work and to wait upon his master’s table, even after a whole day of hard fieldwork. Only when the master’s dinner is served is the slave allowed to quench his thirst and to satisfy his hunger. Jennifer Glancy points out that both parables rely “on the recognition that slaves are expected to be available to their owners” by day and night. The difference “is only determined by the whim of the slaveholder.”¹ But is the idea that a slave-owner serves his slaves at the table at all realistic?

Some interpreters draw parallels to the Saturnalia and similar festivals that celebrate the permutation of roles between masters and slaves.² There

are a few occasions in the Roman festival calendar when it would have been possible for a master or mistress to serve a meal for their slaves. One such festival was Saturnalia, which started on December 17; others included the *Compitalia*, an agrarian thanksgiving,³ the Nonae Caprotinae celebrated by free women (*liberae*) and female slaves (*ancillae*) in the city of Rome on July 7, and the festival of the *Matronalia* on March 1. There were also festivals in Greek tradition with similar features, such as the *Cronia*.⁴

The evidence for a meal served for female slaves at the *Matronalia* is late. Only Macrobius, an author of the fifth century CE, tells us:

“In March . . . matrons would wait on their slaves at dinner, just as the masters of the household did at the Saturnalia – the women by this compliment calling on the slaves at the beginning of the year to give ready obedience, the men rendering thanks for service done.”⁵

Others assert that Roman matrons celebrate at the *Matronalia* the anniversary of the temple of Juno Lucina or receive gifts from their daughters and husbands.⁶ Because these authors say nothing about mistresses waiting on their slaves, we cannot know if Macrobius presents us with a new idea or cites an old tradition, already existing in the early Principate.⁷

A meal for female slaves in Rome might be served at the Nonae Caprotinae (*ancillarum feriae*).⁸ According to an etiology recorded by Plutarch and Macrobius, the festival recalls the female slaves, who rescued the free women of the city from being handed over to the Latins by rendering themselves in the dress of their mistresses to the hands of their enemies.⁹ Slaves and free women sacrifice together on this day at a fig tree and there are some dramatic begging-processions and mock battles.

The evidence for the Saturnalia is much better, but some questions remain regarding its exact nature. On the December 17, the God Saturn (*Cronos*), who had his temple at the foot of the capitol in Rome, was freed from his fetters.¹⁰ For one, three, five, or seven days, he took over the throne once abandoned to his son Jupiter/*Zeus*.¹¹ After offerings and a banquet (*lectisternium*) in front of the temple¹² the cry ‘*Io Saturnalia*’ was the signal for private drinking and dinner parties. Almost everybody, including slaves, had at least one day off. In his guide to profitable management of an estate the elder Cato advises the donation of about a gallon of wine to each slave at the Saturnalia and at the *Compitalia*.¹³ Schools and courts were also closed.¹⁴

During this festival, the Roman male citizens wear a short house dress instead of a toga and put a *pilleus* on their head, the sign of the free and/or manumissioned.¹⁵ Gambling and dice-playing, normally forbidden, now

become primary amusements.¹⁶ Some patrons invite clients to dine with them. Others dine with friends and pass the day with satirical presentations or exhilarating table-talk, witticisms, and riddles.¹⁷ The dinner starts early and lasts until night.¹⁸

An illustration in the calendar of Filocalus from 354, preserved only in later manuscripts, shows some of those present at the festival.¹⁹ Symbols on the image signify components of the festival: a mask alluding to games of disguise at the festival, a set of dice with a container for throwing the dice, birds symbolizing hunting as well as Saturnalian gifts, and a torch suggesting night time. The figure in the image represents either a slave with a short tunic or a hunter with a winter dress. The accompanying text reads: "Behold winter nourishes the seed thrown each year into the ploughed earth; all is wet with rain sent from Jupiter. Now let December call once more the golden festival for Saturn. Now you, slave, are allowed to play with your master."²⁰

Another illustration from a mosaic floor in El-Djem (Tunisia) dated to the late second or early third century CE shows slaves, identified by their attire (the *subligaculum*).²¹ One carries a torch; the other holds wax candles in his hand. Poor clients received presents like used cloth or money and in return offered wax candles (*cerea*) and clay figures (*sigilia*).²² Lucian advised the poor poet to send a book or write something fitting for the occasion.²³

It is interesting that while these illustrations of the month December depict at least some characteristics of the Saturnalia, none displays a meal. This might be due to the fact that these calendars display one or at most three persons each month. But there are not many accounts of masters inviting their slaves to a symposium and serving them in a reversal of normal roles.

The main source for this custom is early Roman tragic poet Accius (*170 BCE) who was cited again by Macrobius:

In most of Greece, and above all at Athens, men celebrate in honor of Saturn a festival which they always call the festival of Cronos. The day is kept a holiday, and in country and in town all usually hold joyful feasts, at which each man waits on his own slaves. And so it is with us. Thus from Greece that custom has been handed down, and slaves dine with their masters at that time.²⁴

The idea is also attested by several others. Athaenaeus says, "during the holidays of the Saturnalia . . . it is customary for the Roman children to entertain the slaves at dinner, while the children take upon themselves the duties of the slaves."²⁵ The satirical laws of Cronosolon, invented by Lucian,

state: "When a rich man gives a banquet to his servants, his friends shall aid him in waiting on them."²⁶

In one of his moral letters on the nature of slavery Seneca discusses the topic "dining with slaves":

"Do you not see even this – how our ancestors removed from masters everything invidious, and from slaves everything insulting? They called the master "father of the household," and the slaves "members of the household (*familiares*)," a custom which still holds in the mime. They established a holiday on which masters and slaves should eat together – not as the only day for this custom, but as obligatory on that day in any case. They allowed the slaves to attain honors in the household and to pronounce judgment; they held a household was a miniature commonwealth."²⁷

But the good conventions (*mos maiores*) of "our ancestors" do not mean for Seneca the invitation of all his slaves. Instead:

"Do you mean to say," comes the retort, "that I must seat all my slaves at my own table?" No, not any more than that you should invite all free men to it. You are mistaken if you think that I would bar from my table certain slaves whose duties are more humble, as, for example yonder muleteer or yonder herdsman; I propose to value them according to their character, and not according to their duties. Each man acquires his character for himself, but accident assigns his duties. Invite some to your table because they deserve the honour, and others that they may come to deserve it. For if there is any slavish quality in them as the result of their low associations, it will be shaken off by intercourse with men of gentler breeding."²⁸

Dining with slaves for Seneca is an educative program for both slaves and free. Both have to learn the stoic lesson that real freedom is actually a state of mind and moral. But furthermore, slaves would become "members of the household" and therefore better slaves.

It is likewise interesting that Seneca refers to mime. Mime, comedy, and satire are further sources of Saturnalian freedom and license. During the campaign in Britannia in the reign of Claudius, Cassius Dio narrates an amusing incident about the failure of the slave Narcissus who was sent by Caesar to prevent a rebellion of the troops. The soldiers instead of listening to Narcissus cried "Io Saturnalia," because, as Dio adds, "at the festival of Saturn the slaves don their master's dress and hold a festival."²⁹ In

Horace' satire the slave Davus takes "the license December allows" (*libertas Decembri*) to tell his master the truth.³⁰ What follows is another version of the stoic theme that "only the wise person is free, but every fool a slave."³¹ In his *Satyricon*, Petronius narrates a Saturnalian banquet which takes place out of time.³² Trimalchio, a former slave who had gained exorbitant riches, invites the narrator, a poor itinerant sage and his two colleagues, his more or less successful ex-slaves. The story is obsessed with eating, with imitations of a fat goose, with fish and all kinds of birds round it, which were made out of pig. This recalls, as the narrator states, the wax or clay imitations he had seen in Rome during the Saturnalia.³³ Finally Trimalchio invites also three of his actual slaves (Philargyrus, Cario and his "wife" Menophila) to take part in his symposium.³⁴

These allusions to the Saturnalia in comedy and satire refer to a topsy-turvy world of the reversal of roles between masters and slaves. But by restricting this freedom to a festival in December, they reinforce traditional role models. Caesar's slave Narcissus is only a "Saturnalian king."³⁵ The bold slave Davus describes to his master real freedom, while for himself takes the back seat of enslaved freedom.³⁶ Even the eloquent and literate Cronos in Lucian's *Satire* is only an old, unmotivated, and powerless God, who is easily outwitted by the rich. Trimalchio is not able to play the role of a free aristocrat or even to act as a master.³⁷ His banquet turns into a wake for someone still living before it ends in overall tumult. His cruel treatment of slaves might be exaggerated; the fear of his slaves and clients was probably not.

Therefore, we cannot say if the small literary evidence for masters dining with slaves or serving them points to any actual practice.³⁸ If so, it would have been restricted to very few.³⁹ For slave-owners this custom might be useful, "in order that the slaves, being softened by this instance of humanity, which has something great and solemn about it, may make themselves more agreeable to their masters, and be less sensible of the severity of their conditions."⁴⁰

But what did the Saturnalian freedom for the slaves in antiquity actually mean? From our literary sources it seems obvious that most of the slaves, and especially the multitudes of *latifundian* (estate) workers, would not have enjoyed the benefits of a banquet at the table of their masters. For most of the slaves, then, the Saturnalia festival means wine and food and some days of the best treatment. But still the reign of Saturn blesses them to be more or less "sumptuously fed"⁴¹ and provides the opportunity to "check their masters with impunity."⁴² But this small and restricted freedom might point to some dissident subculture of the subordinated as well. To be sure, Saturnalia is, if at all, an authorized transgression of normality. But, as James D. Scott, has argued:

The view that the carnival is a mechanism of social control authorized by elites is not entirely wrong, but it is ... seriously misleading. It risks confusing the intentions of the elite with the results they are able to achieve.⁴³

The Saturnalia, like other carnivalesque festivals, is a ritual occasion that provides the opportunity not only to drink and to cast dice but also to assemble in larger groups, to speak more or less openly, to mock, and to share in protest. Satire and mock-laws led one to assume that social criticism was common.⁴⁴ In late antiquity some even fear that Saturnalian freedom was used for revolt.⁴⁵ Though we do not know exactly how the multitudes of slaves celebrated their Saturnalia, we can be sure that they made something out of it for themselves.

There is another interesting aspect of the Saturnalia that should be mentioned: the utopian tradition. In his extract from the lost *Historiae Philippicae* of Pompeius Trogus Justinus (around 400) informs us:

“The first inhabitants of Italy were the aborigines, about whose king Saturn it is said that he was so righteous that under his rule nobody had a subordinate function nor private possession. All things were common property and this was not distributed, as if there was one patrimony for all people together. By way of commemoration of this example it was instituted that during the Saturnalia all differences in juridical position be suspended and that everywhere slaves dine with their masters (*passim in conviviis servi cum dominis recumbent*).⁴⁶

Macrobius refers to this time when he discussed the etiology of the festival

“His reign is said to have been a time of great happiness, both on account of the universal plenty that then prevailed and because as yet there was no division into bond and free – as one may gather from the complete license enjoyed by slaves at the Saturnalia.⁴⁷

And Lucian refers to the same “Golden Age” when he assigns to Cronos⁴⁸ himself the words:

“I take over the sovereignty again to remind mankind what life was like under me, when everything grew for them without sowing and without ploughing – not ears of wheat, but loaves ready baked and meat ready-cooked. Wine flowed like a river, and there were springs of honey and milk; for everyone was good, pure gold. This is the reason for my

short-lived dominion, and why everywhere there is clapping and singing and playing games and everyone, slave and free man, is held as good as his neighbour. There was no slavery, you see, in my time (αὕτη μοι ἡ αἰτία τῆς ὀλιγοχρονίου ταύτης δυναστείας, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ἀπανταχοῦ κρότος καὶ ᾠδὴ καὶ παιδιὰ καὶ ἰσοτιμία πᾶσι καὶ δούλοις καὶ ἐλευθέροις. οὐδεὶς γὰρ ἐπ' ἐμοῦ δοῦλος ἦν).⁴⁹

In the ancient reign of Saturn no slavery existed, and hence no division into bond and free. But now those days are gone. The Saturnalia are a reflection, a faint imitation of the original Golden Age.

The myth entered into the political realm in the first century. With Augustus the Golden Age had returned as Horace emphasized in his *Carmen Saecularum*. But, as H. S. Versnel points out, while the image of the Golden Age with plenty of food and natural peace was evoked again and again by the imperial poets, the abolishment of slavery was not mentioned at all.⁵⁰ It is also clear that neither Augustus' Golden Age nor that of his successors brought freedom and equality to the vast majority of slaves in the Roman Empire. Indeed the opposite is nearer the truth. Nevertheless, the utopian aspirations still remained. In his description of Gaius Caligula's accession to the throne Philo states:

In these days the rich had no precedence over the poor, nor the distinguished over the obscure; creditors were not above debtors, nor masters above slaves, the times giving equality before the law (δεσπόται δούλων περιῆσαν, ἰσονομίαν τοῦ καιροῦ διδόντος). Indeed, the life under Saturn, pictured by the poets, no longer appeared to be a fabled story, so great was the prosperity and well-being, the freedom from grief and fear, the joy which pervaded households and people night and day.⁵¹

For Philo the Golden Age included "no precedence of the rich above the slaves" and this happy reign of Saturn will last as long as the good Caesar reigns. That this was not the case with Gaius Caligula is an obviously ironic quip from Philo.⁵²

It is possible that Philo adds the topic of "freedom of slaves" to the image of the Golden Age under Augustus out of the Jewish tradition.⁵³ The topic is a part of the legend but was not repeated by the poets who praised the return of the Golden Age with Augustus. However, Philo still attests that both the myth and the political vision of Saturn's reign in the Golden Age remind all inhabitants of the Roman world of their essential hopes and dreams of freedom, justice, and equality.

Notes

1. Glancy, *Slavery*, 109–110.
2. See T. Braun, “Dinner for one,” 663; C. Gerber, “Wenn aus Sklavinnen und Sklaven,” 576. More critically M. A. Beavis, “Ancient Slavery,” 48, after a review of the “Saturnalian . . . overturn and reverse [of] the rigid everyday Roman value system” in Plautus’ comedies, “questions the realism of those texts.” For her “the parables are distinctive in that the reward offered to faithful slaves is not manumission but more trust and responsibility” (54).
3. From Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ant. rom.* 4.14.3f, we hear that in Rome the offerings of a honey-cake were made by the slaves of the households.
4. There are some local traditions in Greece and Asia Minor which emphasize that slaves and masters dine together on Cronian festivals. Unfortunately, all evidence comes from Roman authors. Therefore, there might be some Saturnalian influence. See Philochoros (in Macrobius, *Sat.*, 1.10.22); Plutarch, *Mor.* 1098b; Accius (in Macrobius, *Sat.* 1.7.23); Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 14.639b. For a counter-argument, see Bömer, *Untersuchungen über die Religion der Sklaven*, 173–181. But see also Versnel, “Kronos and the Kronia,” 90–135, who points to “a number of closely related ‘Saturnalian’ festivals in Greece which show that ritual freedom of slaves could indeed take various forms” (103). Plutarch mentions also a day called Hyakinthia in Sparta, when “the citizens treated all their acquaintances and their own slaves to a meal” (*Mor.* 303D).
5. Macrobius, *Sat.* 1.12.7. Cf. one century later Johannes Lydos (490–560), *de mensibus* 3.22. Cf. Weinstock, “Matronalia,” 2306–2309, and Freyburger, “Matronalia.”
6. Suetonius, *Vesp.* 19; Tertullian, *Idol.* 14.4; Lukian, *Sat.* 17.
7. Cf. Bömer, *Untersuchungen über die Religion der Sklaven*, 186.
8. Cf. R. Peter Saller, “Symbols of Gender and Status,” 88–9; Bömer, *Untersuchungen über die Religion der Sklaven*, 186–188.
9. Plutarch, *Rom.* 29; Macrobius, *Sat.* 1.11,36–40.
10. Saturn’s feet were chained with woollen threads or fetters during the year. Cf. Macrobius, *Sat.* 1.8.5; Statius Silvae 1.6.4; Arnobius 4,24; Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 22,5.
11. Sacrifice took place only on December 17. But the Saturnalian freedom lasted for some days. The number of days is discussed by Macrobius, *Sat.* 1.10.1–18.
12. It is not at all clear, who was invited to this sacrifice banquet. In telling the legend of its founding in 217 BCE. Livius, *ab urbe condita* 22.1.19–20 distinguishes between a sacrificial banquet and private feasting: “Finally—the month was now December—victims were slain at the temple of Saturn in Rome and a *lectisternium* was ordered—this time senators administered the rite—and a public feast, and throughout the city for a day and a night ‘Saturnalia’ was cried, and the people were bidden to keep that day as a holiday and observe it in perpetuity.” Cf. Macrobius, *Sat.* 1.10.18. Bömer, *Untersuchungen über die Religion der Sklaven*, 185 underlines: “Es ist auffällig und offenbar noch nicht

genügend berücksichtigt, dass die Freiheit der Sklaven und der Kult des Saturns (abgesehen davon, dass beide, die Freiheit und der Kult, am 17. Dezember, dem Stiftungstag des Saturnus *ad forum*, ihren Anfang nehmen) nicht das geringste miteinander zu tun haben.”

13. Cato, *Agr.* 57.
14. Lucian, *Sat.* 13; Macrobius, *Sat.* 1.10.4, 23.
15. Cf. Seneca, *Ep.* 18.2f. Roman students celebrate the festival in Athens (Aulus Gellius, *Noct. att.* 18.2), and so do retired soldiers in the Egyptian Fayum B.P. Grenfell, *Fayum*, 119,28f (AD 100).
16. Suetonius, *Aug.* 71.
17. The setting and the theme of Macrobius' *Saturnalia* is this festival. But the Saturnalia take place only in a theoretical discourse. Cf. C. Frateantonio, "Praetextatus," 368. A more satirical piece is Seneca's *Apol.*, which, as R. R. Nauta argued ("Apolyntosis," 69–96), was written for recitation to Nero at the first Saturnalia-festival in his reign (54 CE). It depicts Claudius as a *Saturnalicus princeps* (8.2), whose reign is now over (*non semper Saturnalia erunt* (12.2)). One characteristic feature of his Saturnalian reign is that Claudius acted as a slave of his freemen. The heavenly court of the gods condemned Claudius to the underworld, where he has to throw dice from a dice-box with a hole (14,3–15,1) and prepare lawsuits as the slave of a freemen. See also Petronius, *Cena Trimalchionis*; and Lucian, *Sat.*
18. Tertullian, *Apol.* 42.
19. December, Romanus 1 ms. Barb. Lat. 2154 fol 23, Biblioteca Vaticana, Rome, cf. Saltzmann, *On Roman Time*, fig. 23.
20. Cf. Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 124–125.
21. Cf. December (detail), El-Djem Mosaic, 3d century, Musée Archéologique, El-Djem, Tunisia, cf. M. R. Salzman, *On Roman Time*, 75–76 and fig. 70.
22. Suetonius, *Aug.* 75; Macrobius, *Sat.* 1.7.32–3; 1.11.49; Lucian, *Sat.* 14–16, 31, 39.
23. Lucian, *Sat.* 16.
24. Macrobius, *Sat.* 1.7.37. Cf. 1.10.22; 1.11.1
25. Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 14.639b.
26. Lucian, *Sat.* 18.
27. Seneca, *Ep.* 47,14 trans. R. M. Gummere (LCL).
28. Seneca, *Ep.* 47.15.
29. Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 60.19.3.
30. Horace, *Sat.* 2.7.1–5; Lucian, *Sat.* 5 speaks as well of a Saturnalian freedom "to check your masters with impunity" (λοιδορεῖσθαι τοῖς δεσπόταις ἐπ' ἐξουσίας).
31. Horace, *Sat.* 2.7
32. This is explicitly stated: When the one of the wandering sages, Giton, starts laughing another guest answers: "Io Saturnalia, do we have December?" (Petronius, *Sat.* 58,2).
33. Petronius, *Sat.* 69,9.

34. Petronius, *Sat.* 70,11–16. The first invited guests are not happy at all: “I need hardly say that we were nearly pushed off the sofas with the slaves crowding into every seat.” For a comparison of Petronian and Christian utopias, see Richard I. Pervo, “Wisdom and Power,” 307–325.
35. Sometimes people elected a Saturnalian King, or chose him by lot, who was allowed to reign over the banquet. “The (Saturnalian King) gives commands: ‘You drink, you mix wine, you sing, you go, you come.’ I obey, so as not to be the one to break up the game.” (Epictetus, *Diatr.* 1.25.8). The king seems at first to be a *rex bibendi* (“king of the drinking party”). But there are some political implications as well (see below).
36. This refers as well to the comedies of Plautus, as argued in S. Döpp, Cf. J. Dingel, “Herren und Sklaven bei Plautus,” 489–504.
37. During the whole symposium Trimalchio acts with unusual cruelty followed by lavish generosity.
38. It is revealing in Macrobius’s *Saturnalia* that when masters more than once serve their slaves at the Saturnalia, something different happens in the frame story. At the end of the extended discourse concerning the origins and rites of the Saturnalia in Book 1 we read, “the head slave (whose duty it was to burn incense before the household gods, to arrange for the provision of food, and to direct the tasks of the domestic servants) had come to inform his master that the household staff had finished the customary annual feast; for in houses where religious rites are observed it is common practice at the Saturnalia to compliment the slaves by first providing for them a dinner prepared as though for the master, and it is not until this meal is over that the table is spread again for the head of the household” (2.24.22–3).
39. Trimalchio invites three slaves from the household (Petronius, *Sat.* 70.11–16).
40. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ant. rom.* 4.14.4. Cf. Macrobius, *Sat.* 1.12.7.
41. Lucian, *Sat.* 2: Cronos himself ordered that the servants be fed (τοὺς οἰκέτας εὐωχεῖν).
42. Cf. endnote 30.
43. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 178.
44. Beside the Saturnalian laws of Lucian we know of the *lex Tappula*, a satirical law inscribed on a panel made of bronze, which was found in the remains of an Italian house. Von Premerstein, “Lex Tappula,” dates it to the 2nd century B.C.E.
45. Asterius, *Homilie* 4.7.2 (PG XL 221A) warns against the Calendars (which was the name of the Saturnalia in the late 4th century) because the soldiers’ rampant mockery of the laws and of Caesar seems to him a great political danger. The late antique military strategist Aeneas Tacticus 22.17 states that festivals are frequent occasions of revolution in the state. Cf. Versnel, “Kronos and Kronia,” 126–128; “Saturnus and the Saturnalia,” 159; and more general, Callahan and Horsley, “Slave Resistance in Classical Antiquity,” 133–151.
46. Iustinus, *Epitoma historiarum Philippicarum Pompei Trogi* 43.1.3–4; translation: Versnel, “Saturnus and the Saturnalia,” 189.

47. Macrobius, *Sat.* 1.7.26
48. The Golden Age is part of the Cronos-myth *per se*; see Versnel, “Kronos and Kronia,” 95–99; but here Cronos is just the Greek name of Saturn.
49. Lucian, *Sat.* 7. The priest answers to this: “I had assumed from the story that this humanity you showed to slaves and those in chains was to do honor to men whose sufferings had been like your own, since you yourself had been a slave and you were remembering your chains” (8). Cf. also the Law for the banquet: “Let every man be treated equal, slave and freeman, poor and rich (ἰσοτιμία πᾶσιν ἔστω καὶ δούλοις καὶ ἐλευθέροις καὶ πένησι καὶ πλουσίοις).” In his letter to the rich, Cronos reminds them to give the poor an equal share at the table during the Saturnalia (32): “In fact the most pleasant thing, more in keeping with conviviality, is equality, and a controller of the feast presides over your banquets just so that all can have an equal share (τὸ γοῦν ἡδιστον καὶ συμποτικώτερον ἢ ἰσοτιμία ἐστὶ, καὶ ὁ ἰσοδαίτης τούτου ἔνεκα ἡγεῖται ὑμῖν τῶν συμποσίων, ὡς τὸ ἴσον ἅπαντες ἔχοιεν).”
50. See Versnel, “Saturnus and Saturnalia,” 191–205.
51. Philo, *Legatio ad Gaium* 13.
52. Cf. Seneca’s mockery in his *Apocolocyntosis* (also note 17 above).
53. There are some Jewish traditions of criticism of slavery. *Jubilees* 11 attributes the origin of slavery to the demons. According to Philo, the Therapeutae avoided slavery. The Roman author Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.4.4, links the Jewish Passover to the honor of Saturn.

CHAPTER 12

Early Christian Meals and Slavery¹

Lillian I. Larsen

In introducing her groundbreaking study of *Slavery in Early Christianity*, Jennifer Glancy emphasizes that while scholars of early Christianity have historically relied on constructing “a seamless picture of ancient life that disguises the jagged edges of the documentation,” it is in fact a harsher reality that best reflects the contours of lived experience.² Asserting that “any description of slavery in antiquity is the product of multiple scholarly decisions,” Glancy argues that “whether one can discern links among miscellaneous sources to tell a connected story” remains a question.³ She reminds her readers that although “the earliest Christian writings are laced with images and metaphors borrowed from the rhetorical domain of chattel slavery, [concrete] evidence concerning Christian slaves and Christian slaveholders is typically fragmentary.”⁴ In seeking to hear voices that echo in silence, to catch glimpses of bodies that remain invisible, one must read around the edges and between the lines.

Philo, De vita contemplativa

A conventional starting point for exploring the question of slavery in ancient Jewish/Christian meal settings remains Philo’s first-century account of the *Therapeutae*. As Philo traces the contours of meal practice in this semi-monastic community, the absence of slaves is a point of particular interest.

They do not use the ministrations of slaves, looking upon the possession of servants of slaves to be a thing absolutely and wholly contrary to

nature, for nature has created all men free, but the injustice and covetousness of some men who prefer inequality, that cause of all evil, having subdued some, has given to the more powerful authority over those who are weaker. Accordingly in this sacred entertainment there is . . . no slave, but free men minister to the guests, performing the offices of servants, not under compulsion, nor in obedience to any imperious commands, but of their own voluntary free will, with all eagerness and promptitude anticipating all orders, for they are not by any chance free men who are appointed to perform these duties, but young men who are selected from their order with all possible care on account of their excellence, acting as virtuous and wellborn youths ought to act who are eager to attain to the perfection of virtue, and who, like legitimate sons, with affectionate rivalry minister to their fathers and mothers, thinking their common parents more closely connected to them than those who are related by blood, since in truth to men of right principles there is nothing more nearly akin than virtue; and they come in to perform their service ungirdled, and with their tunics let down, in order that nothing which bears any resemblance to a slavish appearance may be introduced into this festival (*Contempl.* 70–72).

Philo's highly idealized account is clearly framed in conversation with the traditional excesses associated with the *sympotic setting*. As such, the text serves as a valuable refraction of wider norms. That this group's practice is exceptional is implicit. Whether the *Therapeutae* existed and/or lived out the practice Philo describes remains a question of considerable debate.

Undisputed Letters of Paul

The earliest accounts of what may be framed as distinctly "Christian" meal practice are found in the undisputed letters of Paul.⁵ Here Philo's idealized communal construct finds a qualified echo in Paul's blurring of boundaries between slave and free.⁶ In his letter to the Galatians, Paul premises that "there is no longer Jew nor Greek . . . slave nor free . . . male nor female; for . . . all . . . are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3.28).⁷ His correspondence with the Corinthians is more pragmatic. Regarding slaves, he writes:

. . . let every one lead the life which the Lord has assigned to [him/her], and in which God has called [him/her]. This is my rule in all the churches . . . Were you a slave when called? Never mind. But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.⁸ For [whomever] was called in the Lord as a slave is a [freedperson] of the Lord. Likewise [s/he]

who was free when called is a slave of Christ. You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men. So [brothers/sisters], in whatever state each was called, there let [him/her] remain with God (I Cor. 7.17, 21–24).

Paul's letter to Philemon argues clemency for a runaway slave. However, Paul's somewhat sympathetic rhetoric does little to mask a harsher reality. While "slaves" and "free" may have shared the table in the earliest Christian communities, it is not clear that such a blurring of boundaries extended beyond this immediate context; or that even within a communal setting, such practice was uniformly embraced.

Deutero-Paul

Most scholars agree that the pseudonymous letter to the Colossians reflects the Pauline tradition, but a step removed from the Apostle himself. In crafting this missive, the writer borrows language from Paul's letter to the Galatians. However, subtle rephrasing signals a shift in emphasis. Consigning the promise of an egalitarian ethos to an alternate state, the letter affirms that in the *new nature* ". . . there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free . . . but Christ is all, and in all" (Col. 3.11). Until such an eventuality is realized, however, slaves are instructed to:

. . . obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not with eye-service, as [people] pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever your task, work heartily as serving the Lord and not [wo/men], knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you are serving the Lord Christ (Col. 3.22–24).

The pseudonymous letter to the Ephesians is similarly explicit.

Slaves, be obedient to those who are your earthly masters, with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as to Christ; not in the way of eye-service, as [people-pleasers], but as [slaves] of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. rendering service with a good will, as to the Lord and not to [wo/men], knowing that whatever good any one does, [s/he] will receive the same again from the Lord, whether [s/he] is slave or free (Eph. 6.6–8).

Masters, in turn, are instructed to treat "slaves justly and fairly" (Col. 4.1; cf. Eph. 6.9). All are to be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ

(Eph. 5.21). If only in relative terms, a reminder of ultimate accountability to a heavenly “master” serves to soften starker mandates (Col. 4.1; Eph. 6.9).

The explicit language that characterizes a third generation of letters leaves little room for negotiation.

Let all who are under the yoke of slavery regard their masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be defamed. Those who have believing masters must not be disrespectful on the ground that they are [brothers/sisters]; rather they must serve all the better, since those who benefit by their service are believers and beloved (1 Tim. 6.1–2).

[Tell] slaves to be submissive to their masters and to give satisfaction in every respect; they are not to [answer back], nor to pilfer, but to show entire and true fidelity, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior (Titus 2.9–10).

Here the stark detail used in enumerating the duties of slaves is further accentuated by the absence of any directive to masters.

As the boundary blurring tenor of the earliest layers of proto-Christian meal practice is iteratively reframed, one can read the increasingly strident tone used in articulating reemergent norms in two ways.⁹ Explicitly, these injunctions register a progressive reinstantiation of communal mores that hew ever closer to broader societal expectations. Implicitly, they may well refract the continued influence of women and slaves in nascent Christian communities, and the complicated tensions that were an inevitable result. In the transmitted tradition, these increasingly shrill delineations of clearly defined social roles have served first to mute, then silence, any record of a dissenting voice.

Gospel Parables

Like Jennifer Glancy’s *Slavery in Early Christianity*, Bert Harrill’s volume, *Slavery in the New Testament*, explores the literary, social, and moral dimensions of slavery. Harrill suggests that if the Pauline/Deutero-Pauline letters register tensions between Early Christian slaves and masters, the stock characters in Christian narrative traditions reflect normative perceptions of slaves in the broader Greco-Roman milieu. Harrill observes that, “[b]ecause the Romans traditionally perpetuated their moral values through the retelling of example stories (*exempla*), the use of slaves and masters as literary

figures was commonplace.” Slaves remained “a natural referent for the early Christians, accustomed as Romans to use such language for self-definition and the construction of a religious community.”¹⁰ Harrill’s assertions find ready support in the depictions of slaves at meals encountered in canonical gospel narratives.

In Matthew’s recounting of the parable of the wedding banquet, slaves are sent first to seek out the invited guests, then to gather “both bad and good” from the streets (Matt. 22.1–10). Even when commissioned to collect random individuals to fill the wedding hall, there is no suggestion that the slaves themselves be numbered among the guests. While it is clear from other sources that slaves would have been responsible for every aspect of preparing and serving the meal, the only record of their presence is as attendant “bouncers,” tossing out an uncooperative guest, who appears at the banquet “without a wedding garment” (Matt. 22.11–14).¹¹ As Luke tells the story, the master’s second invitation is directed to the “poor and maimed and blind and lame” (Luke 14.15–24). Both narrative scenarios fail to register the messengers as eligible for inclusion in the invitation they extend.

A subsequent parable in Matthew depicts a “faithful and wise [slave]” giving other slaves “their food at the proper time” (Matthew 24.45). This slave is commended for exercising restraint in indulging personal appetites (Matthew 24.45–51). He is rewarded with greater responsibility, and we might guess, more work. Luke includes a supplemental scenario in presenting an alternate version of this parable (Luke 12.35–48). Adding a surprising twist, he depicts the slavemaster “gird[ing] himself” and rewarding his faithful slaves with a meal (Luke 12.37).¹²

Elsewhere, Luke juxtaposes stock images of slaves and meals in two accounts found only in this gospel. The story of the “prodigal son” depicts an elder brother protesting the lavish meal prepared to celebrate his wayward sibling’s homecoming. He notes that no banquet has ever been readied in his honor, although he has “slaved” for his father for many years (Luke 15.17–32). Luke’s account of the woman who anoints Jesus’ feet at a meal is the only retelling that identifies her as “a sinner” (Luke 7.36–49). It is left for the reader to judge whether Luke’s choice of epithet implicitly suggest attentions conventionally attributed to a slave courtesan.

Disciples as Slaves

As one moves beyond the parables, the nomenclature of slavery is routinely applied to Jesus’ closest followers. Mark uses the language of slavery as a metaphor for the appropriate demeanor of an ideal disciple:

And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great [ones] exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10.42–45).

John depicts Jesus addressing his disciples as slaves within the narrative frame of the last supper.¹³

“No longer do I call you [slaves], for the [slave] does not know what [his/her] master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.” (John 15.15–16).

In the Apocalypse to John, the “slaves” of God stand ready to serve, as they would at any banquet. They are depicted waiting at the foot of God’s throne, with “*his* name . . . on their foreheads” (Rev. 22.3–4). Even in the New Jerusalem, the ideal supplicant remains a slave.

Late Antique Ascetical Traditions

The nomenclature that characterizes the emergent ascetical traditions of late-antiquity suggests that by the fourth century an idealized link between slavery and discipleship had been securely forged. However, beyond this shift in typology, one finds little to challenge Glancy’s assertion that the “attitudes of slaveholders remained constant” or that the “conditions in which slaves lived and worked persisted from generation to generation.”¹⁴ In late-ancient Christian households, codes like those outlined by the “pastor” are firmly inscribed. There is no need to articulate guidelines; adherence to Greco-Roman norms is assumed.¹⁵ Of interest rather, is the ascetic, often an elite figure, who assumes the duties of a slave as an expression of “humility.”

Gregory of Nyssa, *Vita Macrina*

Gregory of Nyssa’s fourth-century encomium to his sister Macrina explicitly frames her ascetic practice in conversation with established norms of slavery.

[Macrina] persuaded her mother to give up their accustomed way of life, their rather ostentatious lifestyle, and the services she had previously been accustomed to receive from her maids . . . [putting] herself on an equal footing with the many in spirit and to share a common life with all her maids, making them sisters and equals instead of slaves and servants . . . turning away from all she was accustomed to . . . so as to share with them one table, bed, and all the needs of life, with every difference of rank eliminated . . . In them no anger, envy, hate, arrogance, nor any such thing was seen . . . Their only care was for divine realities, and there was constant prayer and the unceasing singing of hymns, extended equally throughout the entire day and night so that this was both work, and respite from work, for them (*Vit. Macr.* 7–11).¹⁶

Using language reminiscent of Philo's description of the *Therapeutae*, but lacking its edge of social censure, Gregory paints a picture of a wealthy Cappadocian family, where slavery has, in some sense, gone "out of vogue." Within a storyline that simultaneously critiques and instantiates the institution of slavery, Macrina's humility is measured against the gap that divides masters and slaves. As a literary construct, the presence of slaves at the table inversely registers Macrina's elite status as an exemplary ascetic. We are left to wonder whether enforced "table fellowship" simply imposes an alternate type of servitude on individuals who remain, nonetheless, subordinate. In Macrina's ostensible progression from less permeable to more permeable boundaries, the troubling question of agency is left unaddressed.¹⁷

Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca*

A similar pattern characterizes narratives included in the roughly contemporary *Historia Lausiaca*. Formulated as a travelogue, Palladius's rambling account has been likened in tone to the histories of Herodotus. It purports to relate the lifestyles and praxis of the male and female anchorites whom Palladius has "seen" or "heard about," or with whom he has lived in "the Egyptian desert and Libya, in the Thebaid and Syene" (*Hist. Laus.* Prologue 2). While traditional hagiographical depictions of these protagonists underscore their harsh regimens of self-denial, Palladius's account is more measured.

The *Historia Lausiaca* reports that when the desert monks Isidore, Pisimius, Adelphius, Paphnutius, Pambo, and Ammonius were banished to Palestine, "they were not allowed servants." Instead, the wealthy Melania (the elder) "wore a slave's hood [in order] to bring them what they needed at

evening" (*Hist. Laus.* 46.3). A subsequent entry describes the personal austerities of Melania's daughter and namesake. The younger Melania:

... ate every other day ... and arranged to do some of the manual work of her slave women, whom she made her associates in her ascetic practices ... dwelling in the country, sometimes in Sicily, again in Campania, with fifteen eunuchs and sixty maidens, both freewomen and slaves (*Hist. Laus.* 61.6).

Upon adopting the ascetic life, Melania the Younger "set free eight thousand slaves who desired freedom." Per Palladius, when the young householder attempted to manumit the rest of her slaves, they "did not want this ... choosing rather to serve her brother, to whom she sold them for three pieces of money" (*Hist. Laus.* 61.5).

The demographic make-up of the broader assemblage of Palladius's protagonists is quite varied. While a number retain the epithet of "slave" or "freedperson," the essential details that link each of these lesser luminaries with the institutions of slavery is of little interest. Palladius describes the "Christian maiden" Potamiaena as "a slave of someone or other during the time of Maximian," who was handed over to the prefect of Alexandria to be tortured after "her master was unable to seduce her" (*Hist. Laus.* 3.1–2). The Galatian priest Philoromus, "a most ascetic and patient man ... was born of a mother who was a household slave and a father who was a freeman" (*Hist. Laus.* 45.1). The Cappadocian Sisinnius, disciple of Elpidius, is registered as "a slave by birth, but free by faith" (*Hist. Laus.* 49.1). Their respective praxis elicits little additional comment.

As household constructs are reformulated and/or dissolved, the nomenclature of slavery serves as a measure of exemplary, elite practice. Whether manumitted, sold at discount rates, or named as associates in an elite household, as narrative markers, the status of slaves is consistent. Slaves are integral to an inextricable web of service to elite privilege. Beyond this, the degree to which any particular individual is linked with actual slavery is unremarkable. The habits of real slaves are markedly less interesting than the disciplines of those who maintain congress with slaves as a form of ascetic praxis.

Apophthegmata Patrum

Unlike the narrative tradition attributed to Palladius, the dating, provenance, and authorship of the content encountered in compilations of the *Apophthegmata Patrum* is far from secure.¹⁸ Nonetheless, by virtue of their

genre, it is arguable that these collections register essential community formation in a manner that echoes the tensive negotiation encountered in the undisputed letters of Paul.¹⁹ While the *Apophthegmata Patrum* treat a number of the same figures found in Palladius's *Historia Lausiaca*, their tenor is more varied. At this point, the textual record suggests that an independent *agape* celebration has emerged as a centerpiece of monastic ritual practice.²⁰ However, the convention that surrounds a broader array of meal settings appears more fluid. Accounts convey both experimental blurring of boundaries, and routine instantiations of the status quo. Yet, as in the letters of Paul, amid the cracks and fissures of teaching and transmission, the residual social hierarchies of slavery endure. Even as nomenclature and narrative detail shifts, the physical settings and roles that link master and slave remain clearly defined.²¹

Commenting on an array of excavated Egyptian monastic settlements, like Glancy, papyrologist Roger Bagnall emphasizes the disjuncture that separates the "ideal" and the "real." Bagnall describes a complex at Esna composed of underground atrium-style houses, with floorplans not unlike those that characterize the homes of prosperous Mediterranean families. He notes that: "despite the pervasive attempts of the literary sources to describe a self-denying way of life for ascetics in the desert, many of them clearly lived those lives of self-mortification in a setting designed to remind them of wealth, not poverty."²² Living quarters "give the impression of being modeled after upper-class houses in towns, rather than . . . the habitations of the poor." Cells range from simple to relatively elaborate, "with rooms, a court, a well, and other amenities." A number of habitations include "cool rooms for the storage of dry bread, movable doors, and even glass in some windows."²³ With such loci in mind, the rich detail that characterizes the spectrum of monastic meal scenarios included in extant collections of monastic *apophthegmata* invites further scrutiny.

An *apophthegm* attributed to Isaac, Priest of the Cells, reflects a relatively fluid blurring of boundaries, narratively contextualized within a meal setting:

Abba Isaac said, "When I was younger, I lived with Abba Cronius. He would never tell me to do any work, although he was old and tremulous; but he himself got up and offered food to me and to everyone. Then I lived with Abba Theodore of Pherme and he did not tell me to do anything either, but he himself set the table and said to me, "Brother, if you want to, come and eat." I replied, "I have come to you to help you, why do you never tell me to do anything?" But the old man gave me no reply whatever. So I went to tell the old men. They came and said to him,

“Abba, the brother has come to your holiness in order to help you. Why do you never tell him to do anything?” The old man said to them, “Am I a cenobite, that I should give orders? As far as I am concerned, I do not tell him anything, but if he wishes he can do what he sees me doing.” From that moment I took the initiative and did what the old man was about to do. As for him, what he did, he did in silence, so he taught me to work in silence (*Apoph. Patr.* Isaac, Priest of the Cells 2).

An *apophthegm* attributed to Joseph of Panephrisis, in turn, registers a highly stratified hierarchy structured around clearly defined roles:

One of the old men joined one of his companions and went with him to visit Abba Joseph. He said to him, “Tell your disciple to saddle the ass.” The other replied, “Call him and he will do whatever you want.” “What is his name?” “I do not know.” “How long has he been with you, and you do not know his name?” He replied, “For two years.” The other said, “If in two years you have not learnt your disciple’s name, do I need to know it for a single day? (*Apoph. Patr.* Joseph of Panephrisis 9).

As disciples double as servants, and servants are imaged as disciples, the language of slavery fluidly melds with exemplary ascetic pursuit. If tradition has uniformly framed the attendants that share the cells of the illustrious “desert fathers” as self-designated disciples, a closer reading of text and context suggests a more complicated picture.

Regula Magistri

The sixth-century *Regula Magistri* records what is perhaps the logical outcome of such performative ambiguity. Here the duties that attend meal service are framed as a venue for “practicing humility” (*Reg. Mag.* 18.8). Dissolving the lines between slave and free, the “disciplines” associated with slavery are presented as routinized aspects of monastic life. In rotation, the “brothers” who comprise the Master’s community, “serve in the kitchen for periods of seven days” (*Reg. Mag.* 18.1). In addition to being responsible for the community meals, “these brothers . . . [also] take care of the monastery’s household affairs” (*Reg. Mag.* 19.19):

They take off the shoes of all the brothers . . . and also repair them . . . [D]uring the same week they clean the monastery, wash the rest places, chop the wood, bring water for the face. They pour the water on the hands of the brothers as they go in for Communion. They wash the table

napkins, bath towels, face towels and the brothers' soiled laundry during the time not devoted to cooking. Every day they ignite and extinguish the monastery's lamps trimmed by the cellarer (*Reg. Mag.* 18.9).

Yet, even as the Master's Rule blurs boundaries, it registers keen awareness of the relative humility implicit in various types of work. Monks are barred from "heavy labor." In fact, their involvement in manual occupation is limited to activities conducive to spiritual progress. The Rule enjoins that agricultural lands should be "owned under someone else's management . . . and crafts alone together with the garden suffice as work in the monastery" (*Reg. Mag.* 86).

Conclusion

The texts discussed in this essay represent only a small fraction of the sources that must inform a truly substantive treatment of "Early Christian Meals and Slavery." Nonetheless, this limited survey highlights strikingly persistent patterns. Per Glancy, any changes in the institution of slavery, even across the span of six centuries, are incremental. The same duties ascribed to slaves in the first century continue to be understood as the particular domain of slaves in the sixth. Equally enduring is the manner in which these duties are attached to the discursive rhetoric of slavery—particularly when the institution itself is ostensibly absent.

Simultaneously, if the social reality of slavery remains fixed, the composition of who is actually "at the table," and perhaps actively involved and invested in discourse, appears more variable. Here Philo's articulation of the injustices of slavery, whether real or ideal, is noteworthy. From the vantage point of the sixth century, we may wonder whether it registers the voice and the experience of a Jewish community directly impacted by the experience of slavery. Paul's more equivocal stance can be read in light of the amalgam of Jew and Gentile, slave and free refracted in his rhetoric. In turn, the strident tones of the "Pastor" (Pastoral Epistles) appear to address early constituencies increasingly comprised established householders and their attending slaves.

In later ascetic discourse, the particular behavior of slaves no longer surfaces as a topic of central concern. Narrative accounts, like the *Life of Macrina* and the *Historia Lausiaca*, focus squarely on the illustrious ascetic, for whom assuming the duties of a slave functions as an alternate register of "elite" status. While refractions of slavery in the monastic landscapes captured in the *Apophthegmata Patrum* appear more fluid, the relative place accorded slaves within emergent communities remains an open question.

Read in conversation with the rhythms of life depicted in the *Rule of the Master*, both the commonality and diversity that characterizes monastic accounts is significant. Respectively, each reveals how very little concrete knowledge supports broad assumptions about life in these communities.

Each loci of inquiry underscores the degree to which early Christian and monastic practice remains inextricably intertwined with language and structures drawn from the ledgers of chattel slavery. Over time, and in confounding ways, ideals and ideologies, institutional and relational norms, at once dismantle and reinscribe these structural hierarchies. In turn, just as examining the ways in which the “earliest Christian meals developed out of the model of the Greco-Roman banquet, [has provided] a surer basis for historical reconstruction of Christian origins,”²⁴ so donning this lens to examine monastic texts and contexts raises provocative new questions, and elicits new insight. Further exploration promises equally rich reward.

Notes

1. This essay was first presented in a session of the Meals in the Greco-Roman World Seminar at the 2008 SBL Annual Meeting in Boston. My thanks to members of the seminar for their useful questions and comments. A number of the meals treated in relatively cursory fashion here are explored in far greater detail in publications of the respective members of this group. I am grateful to the Wabash Center and Riksbanken Jubileumsfond for financial support during periods when portions of this paper were being revised for publication.
2. Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, 4.
3. Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, 3.
4. Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, 3.
5. Whether one should frame Pauline meals as distinct from, or emblematic of broader Jewish practice, remains an open question.
6. Davina Lopez (*Apostle to the Conquered*) and Brigitte Kahl (*Galatians Re-Imagined*) offer two of the most provocative re-readings of Paul’s political and social vision.
7. All scriptural citations are taken from the RSV bible.
8. The NRSV translates the Greek of this passage in a manner that makes passive the arguably pro-active force of 21b; cf. Harrill, *Manumission of Slaves*, for more extensive discussion of the ambiguities inherent to the structure and wording of this passage.
9. In her volume, *The Corinthian Women Prophets*, Antoinette Wire reads texts restricting women’s roles in just this light.
10. Harrill, *Slavery in the New Testament*, 3.
11. In his volume, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, Smith observes: “servants were, in a sense, as much a part of the ‘furniture’ of a reclining banquet as were the couches or mattresses for reclining” (44)

12. Treating a broader context of master–slave relationships, Angela Standhartinger offers a provocative rereading of this Lucan reformulation as a play on the *Saturnalia*. See “The Saturnalia in Greco-Roman Culture,” chapter 11 in this volume.
13. The RSV and the NRSV soften the stark language of this passage. Both translate δοῦλος as servant rather than slave.
14. Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, 3.
15. Cf. Elm, *Virgins of God*, 85–87.
16. Cf. Elm’s discussion of Macrina in *Virgins of God*, 78–105. Elm follows convention in framing Macrina’s practice in laudatory prose. Nonetheless, her close reading of the sources offers a richly detailed account of the ascetic norms that, at some level, shaped the rhythms of life in this wealthy household.
17. Elm notes that: “Manumission could have occurred in two ways, either as a *manumissio in ecclesia* or as a *manumissio inter amicos*. *Manumissio in ecclesia*, promulgated by two Constantinian edicts dating from 316 and 323, authorized Christian congregations to free their own slaves. The procedure was highly formalized and involved a declaration in the presence of the bishop or his representative and the entire congregation. A slave thus freed became a full citizen and *persona sui iuris* (*Codex Justinianus* 1.13). *Manumissio inter amicos*, on the other hand, was far less complicated. A [master/mistress] simply declared a slave to be [his/her] friend, expressing this either by letter (*per epistulam*) or by inviting [him/her] to dine at the same table (*per mensam*). In contrast to other forms of manumission, *manumissio inter amicos* did not result in full citizenship, a slave thus freed merely became Latinized” (*Virgins of God*, 85); Gregory’s description suggests that manumission, in this instance, may have taken the latter form.
18. The manuscript tradition of this material is exceedingly complex. Chiara Faraggiana di Sarzana offers a detailed summary of the *APs* complicated history in her essay “*Apophthegmata Patrum*: Some Crucial Points of their Textual Transmission,” 455–467; cf. Rubenson, *Letters of St. Antony*, 145–162. While many of the narratives included in the *Apophthegmatic* collections are set in the Egyptian desert, their literary provenance remains a matter of wide debate.
19. Cf. Larsen, “Rustic Ruminations,” 21–31.
20. McGowan’s work in *Ascetic Eucharists* offers a provocative lens for re-reading the range of narrative detail used in characterizing these meals.
21. An *ostrakon* from the Theban ‘Monastery of Epiphanius’ (MMA 2.180.116), refers to its bearer as “this man of mine.” Here an absence of idealized nomenclature brings the blurred edges of monastic lived experience into sharp focus; Cf. Winlock and Crum, *Monastery of Epiphanius*, 1.182, 2.228.
22. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 296–297.
23. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 297.
24. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 287.

CHAPTER 13

Slaves at Greco-Roman Banquets: A Response

Jennifer A. Glancy

In “Did Slaves Ever Recline at Meals?”, Nancy Evans plainly states, “The custom of reclining at meals in the ancient Mediterranean typically excluded slaves,” a premise central to all four articles on slavery and meals collected in this volume. At the same time, the authors document exceptions to ordinary practice and explore the significance of those exceptions. The articles digest a millennium’s worth of dinner parties, from classical Greek agrarian festivals to the more austere monastic repasts of late antiquity. The presence of slaves at many kinds of banquets is considered—not only at household meals, but also at cultic feasts and the dinner parties held by *collegia*.

An important finding of the Greco-Roman meals seminar is that over an extended period of time the form and practice of the dinner party remained remarkably constant. From the lucid articles gathered here, we learn that during that time period the involvement of slaves was equally commonplace—involvement as servants rather than as diners. For the most part, exceptions to that rule—as in the fabled banquets of the Saturnalia—reinforced rather than undermined social hierarchies. More typically, male and female slaves were available to satisfy the varied appetites of (primarily) free male diners.

Persuaded by the arguments presented in this set of articles, I propose in this response to draw on their findings to think about several interrelated questions about the first few centuries of Christian life. First, what role did slaves play in serving early Christian meals? Second, in what contexts did slaves join other diners at early Christian meals? This second question

leads quickly to other questions—would the presence of enslaved diners at Christian meals have occasioned comment or unease? Would the inclusion of those enslaved diners have destabilized hierarchical relationships? Although we lack the kinds of data that would enable us to provide unequivocal responses to these questions, the wide array of evidence adduced by my colleagues in their investigations goes far in helping me frame some suggestive hypotheses.

Who Served Christian Meals?

In “Early Christian Meals and Slavery,” Lillian Larsen quotes Philo’s description of meals among the (possible legendary) Therapeutae. According to Philo, the Therapeutae eschewed slavery as a violation of human nature, understood to be free. So who served community meals among the Therapeutae? Free men, chosen from the community as exemplars of excellence “acting as virtuous and wellborn youths ought to act who are eager to attain to the perfection of virtue” (*Contempl.* 9.72). No Christian author of the first centuries adumbrates a principled objection to slaveholding akin to the objections attributed to the Therapeutae and the Essenes.

As Larsen notes, “the absence of slaves is a point of particular interest.” Indeed, given the ubiquity of slaves as servers, an active choice to dine without slaves in attendance merits comment. In most contexts it is safe to assume that servers are understood to be slaves. Are Christian meals an exception? Perhaps in some communities Christians emphasized their unity at meals by repudiating reliance on slaves to serve meals, but if so, the practice escaped comment. Even if this were the case, we would still be left with the question of who served Christian meals.

According to Philo, table service among the Therapeutae was an honor. Young men distinguished by excellence were singled out to serve, and that service helped them cultivate “perfection of virtue.” In Luke’s story, at Jesus’ final meal, his followers argued about their relative greatness. Jesus admonished them that “the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves. For who is greater, the one who reclines at table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines? But I am among you as one who serves” (22:26b-27).¹ Although I am uncomfortable drawing straight lines between the sayings and stories of the gospel tradition and their possible settings-in-life in later Christian communities, Luke’s attribution of these words to Jesus would be comfortable for a community whose leaders were expected to serve at meals. Such a practice would, of course, alleviate the expectation that enslaved Christians should play that role (except, of course, in cases where the community leaders were themselves slaves).

To posit a connection between *diakonia* as leadership in the church and *diakonia* as service, including table service, is anything but original. We are confronted by a spectrum of possibilities about who served at Christian tables, a spectrum enabled by the silence of our sources. On one end of the spectrum, we may speculate that table service by community leaders quickly became such a Christian norm that our sources do not bother to comment on it. On the other end of the spectrum, we may speculate that Christian sources are silent about the identity of table servers because their communities conformed so closely to the universal practice of table service by slaves. And of course, one practice may have prevailed in Corinth and another in Jerusalem, and those practices may have changed over time.

Larsen mentions a number of parables involving slaves and meals. At the parables featuring dinner parties, the slaves are pictured as workers rather than guests. Angela Standhartinger opens “The Saturnalia in Greco-Roman Culture” with two Lukan parables, one of which may be most relevant for construing early Christian expectations about the proper place for slaves at table: “Who among you would say to your slave who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field, ‘Come here at once and recline’? Would you not rather say to him, ‘Prepare supper for me, put on your apron and serve me while I eat and drink; later you may eat and drink’?” (17:7–8). The parable does not refer to a banquet but to the private meal of a small landholder, yet there is still an expectation of the availability of slave labor to serve the meal.

In its Lukan context, this parable is addressed to the apostles, who have asked Jesus to increase their faith. Luke’s suggestion that the apostles include slaveholders is incidental and casual. A trend in commentaries is to analyze the parable without recognition of its second person address. Joseph Fitzmyer at least acknowledges the difficulty: “Details in the parable proper (having a servant, a farm with fields to be plowed and sheep to be tended) seem out of place if the parable were originally addressed either to ‘disciples’ or ‘apostles.’”² Such details seem out of place to us—but not to Luke. In 18:28, Peter reminds Jesus that he and his companions left their households to follow Jesus. At least indirectly, Luke implies that some of those households included slaves. Although I do not find it plausible that any of the apostles were slaveholders or former slaveholders, I am certain that Luke was well acquainted with many Christians who were.

Luke expected some of his readers both to attend and to give dinner parties (14:7–14). He accepted that in the normal course of events, slaves attended those who dined. Whether that standard practice was altered when the meal constituted a gathering for worship is unclear. Perhaps at such gatherings the host or other community leader was among the guests “as

one who serves.” Yet even if this is the case, it seems that in Luke’s world slaveholding (and other) Christians would have found it comfortable to be attended by slaves when they dined.

Did Slaves Recline at Christian Meals?

Evans responds decisively to the question of whether slaves in antiquity ever reclined at meals: Yes. Although the role of slaves serving at banquets was taken for granted, festivals afforded regular and public opportunities for slaves to recline, often alongside their owners. Details varied among cities, but patterns remained roughly constant. In Athens, Sparta, and Corinth, slaves reclined at agrarian festivals; urbanization did not terminate such ritual inversion. There is no indication that the experience of slaves and slaveholders dining side by side at celebratory events altered quotidian routine.

In festivities that celebrated traditional rural life, diners often took their places in temporary shelters, or simply reclined on the ground. In a private home, space would limit the number of diners who might feast together; an alfresco meal would alleviate that limitation. Although Christians certainly gathered to dine in private homes, they also gathered to dine in cemeteries, a setting that might logistically have enabled the inclusion of more diners and at the same time shaken up hierarchical orderings among those present.

The conviviality of agrarian festivals may seem remote from urban Christian meals of the first and second centuries. Evans finds a parallel closer in time in the activities of Greco-Roman *collegia*, whose members—slave and free—dined together on a regular basis. Her paper closes:

Likewise the mystery religions of Demeter and Mithras also opened up new possibilities for the bodies of slaves, bodies that slaveholders could not always control. In the voluntary initiatory cults slaves reclined their bodies on couches or at least on the ground, enjoyed cult meals, and learned esoteric knowledge that brought them new and unimagined salvation. This too was a part of the everyday landscape of slavery in the first centuries of the Common Era.

Evans thus sets up a ready comparison with the voluntary initiatory cult that grew around the memory of Jesus of Nazareth. Did slaves recline at early Christian meals? Evans does not attempt an answer, but her thorough analysis of Greek and Roman evidence makes clear that the inclusion of slaves as reclining diners on such occasions would have been consistent with larger trends in commensality.

At the outset of this response I noted that the question of whether slaves reclined at Christian meals leads quickly to other questions—Would the presence of enslaved diners at Christian meals have occasioned comment or unease? Would the inclusion of those enslaved diners have destabilized hierarchical relationships? Involvement of slaves in Christian circles occasioned negative comment from some outsiders—Celsus, for example. However, Christians would hardly have been unique in inviting slaves to take their places at couches in the banquet hall. Although some free persons would have avoided gatherings where they might be expected to recline next to a slave, Greco-Roman sensibilities would not have been shocked to learn of such gatherings.

Whether the inclusion of enslaved diners would have destabilized hierarchical relationships is perhaps a more difficult to answer. Along with Evans's documentation of seasonal festivals where slaves and free persons reclined together, Standhartinger analyzes evidence related to the fabled Saturnalia. A seasonal celebration might provide an annual or semiannual occasion for slave and free to share a common meal, after which relations would return to normal. Christian celebrations would have occurred more frequently—did they redefine normal?

Moreover, at a Saturnalian celebration a slaveholder might serve and a slave recline, but the slaveholder served *qua* slaveholder whereas the slave was served *qua* slave. I infer that Christian gatherings where slave and free dined together would have been different, not spaces of ritual inversion but ideally—albeit elusively—spaces where the oneness of the community transcended distinctions between slave and free.

Standhartinger notes that the Saturnalian tradition was accompanied in some contexts by utopian evocations of a legendary time before the institution of slavery or other forms of subordination. Lucian, for example, ascribes these words to Cronos: "This is the reason for my short-lived dominion, and why everywhere there is clapping and singing and playing games and everyone, slave and free man, is held as good as his neighbor. There was no slavery, you see, in my time" (*Sat.* 7). The familiar formula that in Christ there is neither slave nor free (Gal 3:28) is similarly at home in a utopian scenario, albeit in a future-oriented apocalyptic scenario rather than in nostalgia for a legendary past.

The question remains whether the regular presence of slaves among free-born diners at Christian meals would have challenged the usual hierarchies of slave and free. As Evans and Standhartinger amply document, through many centuries of Greek and Roman dining, permission for slaves to recline at ritualized meals did not lead to recalibration of relations in other contexts. But perhaps some church members who witnessed to the good news did not

understand the oneness of slave and free to be confined to the banquet table. We can at least imagine such a scenario.

The household code in Colossians commands slaves to obey their earthly *kyrioi* in everything, as though obeying the *Kyrios Christos* himself. In Colossians, the combined admonitions to wives, husbands, children, fathers, and slaveholders occupy five verses (3:18–21; 4:1), whereas the admonition to slaves occupies four verses (3:22–25). Perhaps this is by chance, yet the imbalance is so marked as to prompt speculation about whether the author of Colossians is responding to tensions that arose when some Christian slaves took seriously the slogan that “there is no longer slave and free, but Christ is all and in all!” (cf. Col. 3:11). The Greco-Roman meals seminar has amply demonstrated the centrality of commensality to the life of the Christian community. I speculate: The author of Colossians sought to limit the Christian transcendence of status distinctions to the banquet hall—but conviviality was constitutive of Christian life, so some banqueters were unable to accept that limitation. Perhaps.

We may expect that at Christian gatherings, as at many other Greek and Roman cultic meals, slaves regularly reclined, an arrangement that elicited disdain from some outsiders but shocked no one. Whether such inclusion of enslaved diners had broader implications for relations among enslaved Christians and free Christians—especially slaveholding Christians—is a more difficult question.

Did Slaveholders Recline at Christian Meals?

Many early Christians were slaves. Many were slaveholders. We have first-century reports concerning Therapeutae and Essene communities that repudiated slaveholding. We have no such reports about Christian communities. Perhaps in gathering for worship (some) Christians forgot about the status distinctions that defined their daily lives, yet we have no reason to doubt that slaveholders who attended—and hosted—community meals assumed their customary reclining positions. It is worth pondering how Christian practice might have evolved if churches had followed the reputed example of the Therapeutae and Essenes in excluding slaveholders from fellowship.

In “The Sex-Trade and Slavery at Meals,” Carly Daniel-Hughes documents the extent to which the “symposium or *convivium* was constituted (ideally) as the space of male pleasure (the pleasure of the male symposiasts).”³ At least ideally, Christian symposia were an exception. Nonetheless, the expectation that meals should be organized for the benefit of the freeborn male diner surfaced in the writings of at least one Christian author. Clement of Alexandria was familiar with the presence of sex workers—including

musicians—at banquets. The kinds of meals he approved excluded such persons. Clement nonetheless delivered advice to mature, freeborn male diners about their proper conduct when reclining, advice that explicitly separated them from women (whose presence at certain gatherings was to be regretted), slaves, and even younger freeborn men. For Clement, we may say, the Christian symposium was constituted (ideally) as the space of rational pleasure for freeborn men.⁴

Churches baptized men and women, free and slave; the baptized gathered around the banquet table to read from Scripture, pray, sing hymns, and to share food and drink. We do not know the ways that those gatherings altered the relations of the nameless men and women, freepersons and slaves in the first Christian generations. Although slaves are likely to have enjoyed places at the banquet table, slaveholders never yielded their own.

Notes

1. For related comments, see Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal*, 129–130.
2. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 2.1145.
3. My nod is brief here to Carly Daniel-Hughes's convincing contribution, "The Sex Trade and Slavery at Meals." However, my other contribution to this volume ("Temptations of the Table: Christian Responses to Reclining Culture"), developed out of reflection on the implications of Daniel-Hughes's work on the sensuality of the symposium for our understanding of early Christian meal practice.
4. References scattered in Book 2 of *Paed.* See further discussion in Glancy, "Temptations of the Table," chapter 15 in this volume.

PART IV

The Culture of Reclining: Corporeality,
Sexuality, Intimacy

CHAPTER 14

Bodies in Motion, Bodies at Rest: Status, Corporeality, and the Negotiation of Power at Ancient Meals

Carly Daniel-Hughes

This essay explores fictionalized meals in Roman satire, with a focus on Petronius's *Satyricon* and Lucian's *Dialogues of the Courtesans*. I am intrigued by the central role meals play in these texts, and especially the attention to bodily performances that mark them. Where philosophical symposia highlight diners' restrained corporeal displays, and consumption of food, drink, and sex, is minimized, and even avoided, satirical meals scenes redound with depictions of eating, drinking, defecating, vomiting, fighting, and sex. Moreover, it is in these same texts, which highlight the excessive convergence of bodies at the meal—too much talking, too much food, too many slaves, too much emotion, too much singing, just plain too much—that slaves and courtesans become central actors in the convivial scene. What, I ask, accounts for these ribald meals in Roman satire? What might they indicate about meal culture in the Roman world? I am interested, then, in examining bodily performances as they are inscribed in these texts. My argument cautions against reading them simply as windows onto the social realities of ancient dining practices.¹ Yet I argue that the representations of the meal reveal how status and power were negotiated through subtle corporeal performance: sitting, standing, reclining, and the like. It is this aspect of meal culture that renders it a fitting literary scene for these satirists' rhetorical projects aimed, ultimately, to critique Roman notions of elite subjectivity.²

Contextualizing Satire: Bodily Performance at the Meal

To recline at a festive, domestic meal, a *convivium*, in the Roman world was to partake in *otium*: leisure. It was a posture, Matthew Roller notes in his *Dining Posture in Ancient Rome*, associated with elite men who enjoyed “wine, food, companionship, and the prospect (at least) of sex.”³ At the ideal banquet male, and female, diners would be propped on downy couches, adorned with floral wreaths, and relax while before them slaves scurried to bring in elegant tables, with leonine legs, covered with delectable foods, figs and nuts, later fish and pork glistening in garum sauce.⁴ Beautiful, youthful, male slaves circulated wine in handsome cups, while sweet-tempered child slaves would sit at their mistresses’ feet. Flute-players, harpists, and slaves, male and female, likewise danced and sang at the guests’ pleasure.

If reclining denoted privilege than other postures, such as standing, sitting, and even more subtly moving—getting drinks for others—or remaining still—having the handsome cup-bearer get it for you, sharing in the common cup, or being refused it, reveal how corporeal performance sustained social boundaries and hierarchies at the meal. The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has argued that worldviews, including hierarchical schemes, cosmologies, politics, and the like, what he calls *habitus*, are instilled pedagogically “through injunctions insignificant as ‘don’t hold your knife in your left hand,’” or in ancient Rome, don’t drink from the cup before pouring out a little wine to the gods, or eat dry foods and not wet ones.⁵

As Matthias Klinghardt and Dennis Smith have shown, the meal not only was constituted ideally as the space of equals and friends, but it was also a space that reinforced social distinctions and hierarchies.⁶ These seemingly conflicting goals of equality and stratification, however, are precisely what made the meal a site of social experimentation, as Hal Taussig has recently argued. Taussig considers meals a space where social dichotomies, rich and poor, women and men, slave and free, are brought to bear in the shape and form of the meal.⁷ If slaves and women recline at the meal, he suggests that we can read it as an “experiment” concerning interactions between these groups in everyday life, the total authority of a master over a slave, or man over his female lover. In this way to sit and stand, recline or not, were corporeal acts marked with symbolic power in the meal precisely because they encoded and reflected these conflicting social schemes of power.

Representing the Meal: Philosophy and Satire

This social context alerts us to the ways in which the negotiation of status at the meal could also be inscribed into fictive accounts of them. In

philosophical dialogues very often we find bodily postures and positioning of characters deployed to support moral arguments or heighten dramatic tensions. For instance, in his *Banquet of the Seven Sages*, Plutarch describes two women, Melissa and Eumetis. The former sits and does not speak, while the latter reclines and does. Eumetis, of course, is treated in a more positive way in the narrative.⁸ She knows her place in the meal, a philosopher, yes, but a woman too. Thus she sits and lets others speak about her, a clear demonstration of the virtues of humility and modesty. In Plato's *Symposium* Alcibiades sexual advances toward Socrates reveal that bodily position could likewise configure relationships among diners. In this dialogue the love-struck Alcibiades recalls a time when he climbed under the rough tunic of his teacher, Socrates, on the symposial couch.⁹ The source of his embarrassment at being rebuffed—"when I got up in the morning I had no more slept with Socrates . . . than if he'd been my father or elder brother!"¹⁰—comes from the fact that he submitted himself to his teacher (thus taking a risk that this shift in status would "pay off" in making himself the teacher's favorite), but that the intimate physical relationship implied in reclining below Socrates was denied. In snuggling Socrates, Alcibiades shifted the power dynamics between himself, a freeborn man and another freeborn man, a gamble that proved disastrous for him because of Socrates' refusal of his affections.¹¹

These discussions of posture, seating, and movement, combined with debates about setting and placement, are also often coupled with depictions of the austere food of the meal. So we learn that Plutarch's seven sages eat little and enjoy water, that Socrates will decline wine for the purpose of serious discussion, or, for instance, that Philo's philosophically minded sect, the Therapeutae, prefer water. These details distinguish a meal, and its diners, as virtuous, based on the notion that a philosophically edifying discourse does not risk transgression of corporeal boundaries. The philosopher should be self-contained and in control. Thus his careful speech is matched by his restraint and moderation, including his comportment at meals.¹²

Conversely, in satire, the transgression of hierarchies and boundaries, at the meal, is highlighted very often by the crass bodily displays of its characters. For example, in Lucian's *Symposium* a gathering of philosophers converges on a wedding banquet. They do not partake in the thoughtful discussions of morality, love, or even etiquette that populate Plutarch and Socrates' symposia. Instead, the participants chide each other for their philosophical views, while casting aside all manner of social etiquette. They steal and fight over food; one guest urinates on the floor, while another accosts an attending flute-girl. The whole ordeal ends with a brawl in which many injuries are sustained—no less by the poor wedding groom. Summing up his impressions of the occasion, Lucian's interlocutor Lycinus proclaims: "This much,

however, I have at last learned, that it is not safe for a man of peace to dine with men so learned.”¹³ At this meal, the philosophers mock the very notion of corporeal restraint, and revel instead in its dissolution with catastrophic results. Similarly, in the famous scene from Petronius’ *Satyricon* the *nouveau riche* host, Trimalchio, speaks about his bouts of constipation and reminds his guests of the necessity to step outside to urinate and defecate—much to their chagrin.¹⁴ Does the humor of these accounts rest on the fact that they point out the intimate and destructive elements of food consumption inherent in the meal setting? What connects boorish culinary habits and the transgression of social convention in these fictive meals?

These satires render explicit that eating food can extend bodies into each other. Because in eating one “makes the world a part of himself,” when meals are shared diners ingest “the world” together. It is this possibility that makes the meal setting an ideal one for the satirical writer precisely because in eating bodies transgress boundaries and collide with the world around them, with other bodies. Bakhtin writes:

Eating and drinking are one of the most significant manifestations of the grotesque body. The distinctive character of this body is its unfinished nature, its interaction with the world. These traits are most fully and concretely revealed in the act of eating; the body transgresses here its own limits: it swallows, devours, rends the world apart, is enriched and grows at the world’s expense . . . Here man tastes the world, introduces it into his body, makes it part of himself.”¹⁵

Some genres dramatize what Bakhtin calls the grotesque body, such as satire, marked, he says, by “the violation of the usual and the generally accepted.”¹⁶

In Bakhtin’s examination of Roman satire, he pays special attention to Minippean satire, a genre distinguished for its fusion of multiple sources and literary types. Distinctive of Menippean satire, he notes, are “scandal scenes, eccentric behavior, inappropriate speeches and performances . . . they make a breach in the stable, normal (‘seemly’) source of human affairs.” It is, in short a “carnivalized” genre (as is sympotic literature in his view, though less fantastic in its form of experiment).¹⁷ Carnivalized literature generally is defined by a penchant for “*free and familiar contact among people . . . a place for working out in a concretely sensuous, half-real and half-play-acted form, a new mode of interrelationship between individuals* [italics original].”¹⁸

In what follows, I read Petronius’s *Satyricon* and Lucian’s *Dialogue of the Courtesans* as examples of carnivalized literature, as instances in which the meal becomes a literary occasion to envision new modes of contact between

people. Supporting this link is the fact that the meal, an erotic and intimate space, was also one featuring agonistic performance and tension over bonding and boundaries, a space in which status and power were negotiated and enacted. Ultimately, I demonstrate how these satires envision ribald meals that highlight the presence of marginalized subjects, freedman, slaves, and courtesans, and in the process critique Roman constructions of elite subjects, as self-controlled and virtuous.

Trimalchio's Banquet

In Petronius's *Satyricon* not only characters and events but also traditional form and genre of the novel commonly subvert reader expectations and fall outside familiar frames of reference.¹⁹ Indeed, scholars have wondered how best to describe this fragmentary text, and in particular, the main scene preserved in it, the *Cena Trimalchionis*, Trimalchio's meal. In this scene, the narrator and hero, Encolpius, attends a meal at the home of Trimalchio, a freedman of Naples.²⁰ Here slaves and entertainers are major parts of what emerges as an overly chaotic, over-abundant, and excessively carnivalesque meal. In keeping with the satirical genre,²¹ in the *Cena Trimalchionis* what Bakhtin calls the "grotesque body" appears on nearly every page; bodies do not retain their limits on this occasion: diners crash into each other, fights erupt, slaves keep dropping things, and people scurry in and out. Trimalchio plays the role of the exceptionally grotesque—fighting, defecating, talking excessively, and even ending the evening with a rehearsal of his own death. This meal refuses to correspond to audience expectations of "normal human affairs."

Trimalchio, in fact, cannot stop interacting with and calling attention to the slaves' presence.²² Thus, after a "troupe of slaves" drops hors d'oeuvres, he announces that new tables will be set before each guest, "so that these filthy slaves won't make us so hot by crowding past us."²³ Throughout the meal, slaves are engaged in conversation and made to account for themselves. We may contrast this ribald meal with comments on slaves at meals that we find in other contemporary accounts. Considering the unhappy situation of slaves at the meal who are made to stand, Seneca, for example, writes: "... their slightest murmur is repressed by the rod; they pay a huge penalty for the slightest breach of silence; all night long they have to stand around, hungry and dumb."²⁴

At Trimalchio's meal, however, slaves are far from the "quiet and silent" sort experienced by Seneca.²⁵ A particular feature of Trimalchio's banquet is that slaves and guests invariably collide with each other. In one scene, an acrobat collapses onto Trimalchio, who then gives the boy his freedom.²⁶

During the banquet, slaves are twice saved from elaborate punishments by pleading to the guests for help; they are made the object of a scuffle between a husband and wife at the banquet; and their antics result on two occasions in their immediate manumission—the acrobatic slave mentioned and another young slave, a cup-bearer, dressed as Dionysius who sings his master's (rather abhorrent) poetry in a "shrill soprano" while feeding guests grapes from his basket.²⁷ In freeing him, Trimalchio demonstrates the effusive, and somewhat unpredictable, nature of his hospitality, and also suggests that an arbitrarily fine line separates him, as a freedman, and master, from his slaves. Thus telling his guests that at his death he will free all his slaves, he explains: "Ah, my friends, a slave is a man and drank his mother's milk like ourselves, even if cruel fate has trodden him down."²⁸ When Trimalchio and his wife, Fortunata, engage in a brawl, Trimalchio reveals Fortunata's humble beginnings as a "chorus-girl."²⁹ Indeed, master and mistress are shown to be dangerously proximate in origin to the slaves who populate their home.

There is in fact a connection between Trimalchio's bodily excesses, the ostentatious character of his meal, and his repeated engagement with slaves. As Bakhtin's notion of the grotesque allows us to see, relinquishing pretensions to his own corporeal boundaries gives rise to Trimalchio's "free and familiar contact" with all those around him, with his disregard for shoring up distinctions and his willingness to abandon them arbitrarily. In this way, Trimalchio is a fitting parody of the ideal of the Roman subject, whose bodily decorum was said to distinguish him as virtuous and to authenticate his *imperium* over others, particularly slaves. Roman men often relied on their performance to shore and render as natural their elite subject position, defined in terms of "impenetrability," of freedom from bodily violation.³⁰ Such a position, however, relied on the notion of a "counter-example," linked to a slave, a woman, a foreigner, whose were seen as "penetrable," exposed to repeated bodily violation, and thus, lacking in virtue. The humor of Petronius's fantastical meal, however, is that the host, Trimalchio, behaves in ways that undermine these differences, for his effusive behavior suggests anything but his restraint and virtue. Instead, his behavior unsettles this dichotomy, pointing out the possibility of a flawed performance.

Trimalchio highlights the novelty of his freedman status, recounting his former slavery, manumitting his current slaves, so as to join him, rather than asserting the distinctions between them. He creates, in other words, a scene in which the boundaries between people—particularly, we have seen, freedmen and their slaves—are repeatedly, and even dangerously, transgressed through repeated physical contact. Trimalchio's performance, in fact, mimes rather than perfects that of the idealized Roman *vir*. Petronius's

parody of Trimalchio and his meal produce a subject who does not fit precisely in the Roman world beyond the novel. For instance, Trimalchio's *lararium*, a shrine to his family, contains his first beard clippings, and not, as we would expect, his family *gens*. For indeed, a freed slave he has no *gens* of his own. So, too, in his atrium, where we would think to find *imagines* (funerary masks of his illustrious ancestors), we have only frescoes featuring his own manumission.³¹ Without children and heirs, he cannot be sure that his memory—an important constituent of Roman subjectivity—would be preserved. He engages in discussions of his commemoration, but seeks approval from his slave about what his epitaph should read.³²

Trimalchio stands ultimately unconnected: his guests are invited into his labyrinthine home—in which they get frequently lost—by a host who has no “past ancestry” and must rely on a slave for his “future commemoration.”³³ Shelley Hales concludes: “Trimalchio's *domus* is a sealed box in which he can be king of his castle . . . His authority can only exist within this *domus*-gone-wrong, within the fantasies he creates through manipulation of the visual world around him.” It is little wonder that Trimalchio's behavior strikes his guest, Encolpius, as an oddly staged affair. Thus Encolpius comments: “You would think you were in the chorus of the pantomime not the *triclinium* of a paterfamilias.”³⁴ The meal is, in fact, a stage in which Trimalchio pretends, ultimately unsuccessfully, to occupy the role of a paterfamilias. In fashioning Trimalchio, Petronius exposes the arbitrariness of elite subjectivity, and thereby reflects it back to his readers through the flawed theatrics of this most unlikely host.³⁵

The Case of the Courtesan

Where Petronius uses Trimalchio's fantastic performance at the meal to consider Roman elite subjectivity, Lucian appropriated the symbolic power of the courtesan at the meal to parody his own subject position as a colonialized orator. In his second-century text, the *Dialogues of the Courtesans*, we find a series of conversations between courtesans that pokes fun at the tenuous status of the courtesan and her mother (usually also her *lena*, pimp). In them, the courtesan emerges as a calculating, deceptive creature whose life is marked by poverty, instability, fear, and competition. The comic element in these dialogues rests on showing how the courtesan is forced to manipulate her lovers, very often in the context of the meal. The topic of courtesans at banquets features frequently in these dialogues as a result of Lucian's satirical strategies. Lucian merges the genre of dialogue, associated with philosophical symposia, and that of comedy, replete with stock characters: the cunning slave, cuckold husband, beautiful youth, and

of course, courtesan. In so doing the satirist plays with generic expectations and imagines the marginalized female prostitute occupying center stage as the primary interlocutor.

For instance in *Dialogue* 12, a courtesan named Joessa decries her own stupidity at not charging her lover Lysias more at the beginning of their relationship because now he has lost interest, and will not compensate her, a fact that emerges in the course of the meal. Joessa explains:

. . . you've been having jokes with Lycena, before my very eyes, to annoy me, or other times praising Magidium, the harp-girl, when we were dining together . . . the way you kept on making signs to Pyrallis, and would lift up your cup to her, when you drank, and whisper in the slave's ear, when you returned the cup, telling him not to give anyone a drink unless Pyrallis asked for one!³⁶

Joessa's complaints—which also include Lysias' attempts to throw apple cores across the room to land between another courtesan's breasts!—imagines this meal as the site of erotic competition. The humor of it, however, rests on the inversion of roles. This scene mimics plotlines frequently found in Roman comedy, but shifts expectations. Indeed, it is generally a male lover who must discern whether a courtesan is acting in “good” or “bad” faith, whether her performance is authentic or duplicitous.

In Plautus's play, *Asinaria*, for example, Diabolous, a hopeful patron of the courtesan, Philaenium (who ideally wants to be with the young Argyrippus), attempts to constrain the girl's behavior so as to insure her devotion. The “parasite” recommends to Diabolous the following absurd, and archaically legalistic, contract for the girl's conduct:

Parasite: In case she has eyed another, she shall go blind forthwith. Thereafter, in harness with you, she shall down glasses: plied by you, she'll toast you, and hand back for you to drink, so taste she'll have, no less no more, than: you.

Diabolous: Enough. Approved.

Parasite: . . . After that, ‘afterwards,’ if the lamp snuffs, she shall not move one limb of her in the dark: not at all.³⁷

Diabolous's attempt to constrain the girl's behavior is comedic precisely because he cannot ultimately constrain her desire, which rests with the young Argyrippus to whom she is joined at the play's end. The humor here plays on the association of the courtesan as a “performer,” one who acts and “fakes it.” Indeed it this cultural conception of prostitutes that aligned them

with actors, as *infames*, persons without dignity, and rendered them fitting characters for comedy.³⁸

Anne Duncan explains that the courtesan features so prominently in Roman comedy as the result of Roman elite disdain for and interest in those subjects, women, slaves, and foreigners (and the courtesan could signal all of these things), precisely because, as we have seen, they functioned as a “counterexample” to notions of elite subjectivity, defined in terms of virtue and self-control.³⁹

By adapting the genre of comedy to suit his rhetorical aims, Lucian, then, relied on the symbolic potential of the courtesan as the maligned and desired other. As Kate Gilhuly has argued, however, his literary construction of the courtesan takes on a different valence by bringing together Roman comedy and philosophical dialogue.⁴⁰ This literary feat enables a more subtle appropriation of the courtesan at the meal so that she stands in not as the object of curious delight for a Roman audience, but as a “self-parody” of Lucian’s own oratorical displays, a claim that sophistry of the second century bears imperfect resemblance to its idealized Attic form.⁴¹ Like Atheneaus’ *Deipnosophistae*, which I considered in [chapter 10](#), in Lucian’s satire the *hetairai* indicate an archaic Greek past once glorious, but now lost.⁴²

Thus in Lucian’s *Dialogues of the Courtesans* we do not find edifying dialogue of philosophers associated with the Attic Greek past, but the seedy, shallow musings of prostitutes. Gilhuly notes that Lucian “pries” the courtesan from the comedic context in which she was invented. In this way, the *Dialogues* does not offer satisfactory resolutions—which in comedy include integration of a “good faith” courtesan (often found out to be an Athenian) into civic life, like Plautus’s Philaenium who is united to the young Argyrippus. Instead, Lucian’s courtesans gain a “subject position in Greek literature,” but lose “the potential to be integrated into the civic order.”⁴³ This commentary serves, Gilhuly argues, to parody his subject position as a Greek-speaking Syrian orator living in the Roman Empire.

Building on Gilhuly’s argument, it is intriguing to note that meals serve in the *Dialogues* as a rich literary occasion for building this parody. In *Dialogue* six, for instance, Lucian imagines a conversation in which a mother instructs her courtesan daughter how to sublimate her own desires to be the perfect companion at the banquet and make more money. The mother recounts the strategy of the successful courtesan, Lyra, saying:

Corbyle: In the first place, she dresses attractively and looks neat; she’s gay with all the men, without being so ready to cackle as you are, but smiles in a sweet and bewitching way; later on, she’s very clever when they’re together, never cheats a visitor or an escort, and never throws herself at

the men. If she takes a fee for going out to dinner, she doesn't drink too much—that's ridiculous, and men hate women who do—she doesn't gorge herself—that's ill-bred, my dear—but picks up the food with her finger-tips, eating quietly and not stuffing both cheeks full, and, when she drinks, she doesn't gulp, but sips slowly from time to time.

Corinna: Even if she is thirsty, mother?

Corbyle: Then most of all, Corinna . . .⁴⁴

Commenting on this passage, Gilhuly shows that Lyra, the successful courtesan, is figured as such precisely because she makes herself into a nonentity, where Corinna, by contrast, seems to relish her "appetites." We might say that she appears by contrast as a "grotesque" body—cackling, chewing loudly, guzzling her drink, and in short, letting her own desires be known.⁴⁵ Corbyle tells her daughter Corinna to learn another kind of bodily performance, to discipline her appetites, to conceal them beneath an act that would make her an erotic object. The corporeal restraint being advised to a courtesan, Corinna, parodies the corporeal austerity esteemed in the philosophical symposia of Plato and Plutarch considered earlier. Where Corbyle advises for Corinna a bodily pedagogy that would turn her from a desiring subject into the object of another's desire, for the sophists, this same corporeal discipline, figured as a refusal of food and drink, reveals their moral subjectivity. The courtesans' imitation, then, of corporeal austerity emerges as precisely the opposite, a ruse and a mere performance, rendering her subjectivity suspect.

Lucian facilitates, in part, the connection between the courtesans and the sophists by locating these women in the context of the meal. By constructing a scene at once imitative of Greek philosophical heritage, and as I have argued, a space of agonistic competition over status, placing Lyra and Corinna there, Lucian can use the courtesan's self-fashioning as a parody of his own as a rhetor. In her study *Making Men*, Maud Gleason has argued that for men of the curial class, rhetorical training entailed the pedagogy of the body, which included gait and movements as well as the pitch and tenor of the voice.⁴⁶ Rhetorical exercises, she concludes, had the aim of constituting a male body as one that bore the characteristics associated with high birth, self-control, and mastery.⁴⁷ Of course, oratory could be seen as a site for considerable anxiety as well, demanding greater attention to securing a performance that would in fact produce the desired results.

Thus Roman rhetorical teachers, like Quintillian, advised their students against slavishly courting the pleasure of their audiences, just as they suggest that the best rhetorical performance is an "authentic" one, one that reveals a rhetor to be a "good man."⁴⁸ Where Quintillian attempts to disrupt the link between false and authentic performance, writers of the second Sophistic,

like Lucian in his *Dialogues*, offer a commentary on the corporeal demands placed on the orator who must please his audience and make his body and his speech what they want.⁴⁹ This parody ultimately heightens the disjuncture between the present form of Greek oratory and its classical antecedent. It is here that Lucian's use of the courtesan can be situated. Placing these unlikely interlocutors in the space of the meal, the satirist takes full advantage of that space in which corporeal performance was required to ensure bonding and boundaries. By providing a context for reflection placed in the mouths of duplicitous courtesans, meals become a "hologram" for the oratorical stage in which Lucian, a colonized Greek rhetor must engage in self-fashioning and performance necessitated by fickle clients, in whose world he is never fully an equal.

Conclusion

The satirical meals of Petronius and Lucian offer an important counter-weight to the austere meals we find in classical sympotic literature. I have considered these literary accounts as reliant on the meal setting as an occasion marked by competing tensions over bonding and maintaining social hierarchies. The latter, we have seen, were negotiated through subtle movement, through postures and placement. Yet sharing in a meal suggested erosion of those boundaries, and of sharing enjoyment together, in a space rife with intimate and erotic possibility. For this reason meals proved a rich literary occasion for a satirist to reflect on the tensions inherent in the maintenance of status and authority in the Roman Empire. In these accounts, barriers between diners and slaves are transgressed and generic expectations are violated so that the authors can reflect on the performative—and thus, potentially arbitrary—nature of elite subjectivity in the Roman world. As such Petronius and Lucian imagine new subjects, the freedman and the barbarian rhetor, even if these figures only haunt the fictive stage of the satirical banquet.

Notes

1. A few scholars continue to read literary representations of the courtesan with a view to the social conditions of Roman women. Focusing on Roman comedy and elegy—though not the satirical texts I consider here—Sharon James, for instance, suggests that these texts point to male anxieties over controlling the independent courtesan, see, "A Courtesan's Choreography," 224–251, and her study of elegy, *Learned Girls and Male Persuasion*. For a critique of her interpretation of women in elegy, see Marilyn Skinner's review of this title in *CP* 98 (2003): 403–406.

2. My use of the term “subjectivity” refers to the social discourses by which an individual is shaped as a “subject” within a particular historical context. I am informed by Foucault’s examination of the subject and power here, and have in view, the ways in which discourses enabled Romans to constitute themselves as particular kinds of “subjects,” which is knowable to themselves and intelligible to others. For Foucault, bodily practices are elemental to subject formation, as they are the means by which “norms” are internalized; see Foucault, *Power*, 326–348, for a brief discussion, and for a theoretical elaboration of the relationship between subject formation and bodily practices in Foucault’s work, see Heyes, *Self-Transformations*, particularly chapter 1. Here I am interested in how those discourses rendered bodily comportment central to the construction of Roman *vir*i as self-controlled and virtuous. Considerable work has been done on this topic, particularly in light of Roman rhetorical exercises, for example, Gleason, *Making Men*, and Gunderson, *Staging Masculinity*, which I cite below.
3. Roller, *Dining Posture in Ancient Rome*, 16.
4. See Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 13–46, and Taussig, *In the Beginning was the Meal*, 23–26.
5. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 94.
6. Cf. Taussig, *In the Beginning was the Meal*, 65.
7. Taussig, *In the Beginning was the Meal*, 61.
8. Plutarch, *Mor.* 150b; cf. chapter 6 in this volume by Angela Standhartinger, “Women in Early Christian Meal Gatherings: Discourse and Reality.”
9. Plato, *Symp.* 219a–c.
10. Plato, *Symp.* 219d (trans. Hamilton and Cairns, *Dialogues*, 570).
11. In fact, Alcibiades hopes for an “exchange” of sex for learning.
12. On philosophical ideals of the human body, particularly Stoic and Platonic, particularly as they apply to early Christian constructions, see Martin, *Corinthian Body*, 3–37, and Shaw, *Burden of the Flesh*, especially chapter 2.
13. Lucian, *Symp.* 48 (trans. LCL).
14. *Sat.* 47.
15. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 281.
16. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, 120.
17. Thus status issues are often raised in the symposial context of the meal, for instance, Plutarch *Quaest. Conv.* 615c–619a; cf. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 56–57; and of course, Jesus notably raises this concern in meal settings in the gospels, see Luke 14:7–14 and John 13:1–20.
18. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, 122–123.
19. On the genre of the *Satyricon*, see Slater, “Reading the *Satyricon*,” 24.
20. On Trimalchio’s social status, see Andreau, “Freedmen in *Satyricon*,” 114–124.
21. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, 114–119, and on the *Satyricon* in particular as Menippean satire, see 133–134.
22. Trimalchio discusses his former status in *Sat.* 57.
23. *Sat.* 34. (trans. LCL).

24. Seneca, *Ep.* 47.3, cited in D'Arms, "Slaves at Roman Convivia," 177.
25. On using the *Satyricon* to reconstruct a social history of the meal, see Jones, "Dinner Theater," 185.
26. *Sat.* 54.
27. For instance, *Sat.* 41 and 54. Later Trimalchio promises to manumit all of his slaves, see below.
28. *Sat.* 71 (trans. LCL). It might be that Petronius mocks Seneca himself whose letters consider the theme of "common humanity" from a Stoic perspective; see Sullivan, *The Satyricon of Petronius*, 133–136.
29. *Sat.* 74.
30. On rhetoric and gendered performance, see Gleason, *Making Men*, and Gunderson, *Staging Masculinity*; for idealized notions of masculinity as signifying "impenetrability," see Walters, "Invading the Roman Body."
31. Hales, "Freedman's Cribs," 171.
32. Hope, "At Home with the Dead," 150.
33. Hales, "Freedman's Cribs," 170.
34. *Sat.* 31; cited in Hales, "Freedman's Cribs," 174.
35. For Hales ("Freedman's Cribs") Petronius's account disparages nouveau riche as cultural pretenders, whose insularity as a social group is reflected the way Trimalchio's house ultimately refers back only to him, to nothing beyond it. Her reading looks in particular at the artistic imagery in Trimalchio's home, comparing it with remains from homes in Pompeii.
36. Lucian, *Dial. meretr.* 12 (trans. LCL).
37. Plautus, *Asin.* 765–770 and 785. Translation from Henderson, *Asinaria*, 81–83.
38. See Edwards, "Unspeakable Professions."
39. See Duncan, "Infamous Performers," 255.
40. Gilhuly, "The Phallic Lesbian," 276–278; cf. "Bronze for Gold," 64–68.
41. Gilhuly, "Bronze for Gold," 89.
42. Gilhuly, "Bronze for Gold," 68; cf. McClure, *Courtesans at the Table*, 26.
43. Gilhuly, "Bronze for Gold," 67.
44. Lucian, *Dial. meretr.* 6.
45. Gilhuly, "Bronze for Gold," 78.
46. Gunderson, *Staging Masculinity*, 29.
47. Gleason, *Making Men*, 104.
48. Gleason, *Making Men*, 111.
49. See Gilhuly, "Bronze for Gold," 85 and 90 on the similarity of orator and courtesan as illuminated in other rhetorical literature.

CHAPTER 15

Temptations of the Table: Christians Respond to Reclining Culture

Jennifer A. Glancy

Jesus enjoyed dinner parties, or so the evidence suggests. He was remembered as a partygoer. In the Gospel of John, what is considered unusual is that Jesus lowers himself to wash the feet of his fellow diners. That he reclines among his friends is not out of the ordinary (13:1–25). A picture emerges of Jesus as one accustomed to recline with friends and associates at meals.

The Gospels also suggest Jesus was criticized for his dining behavior. According to Luke, for example, after a sumptuous banquet held by a tax collector named Levi, Jesus was criticized by Pharisees and scribes for reclining among tax collectors and sinners (Luke 5:29–32; Matt 9:10–13). A Pharisee named Simon who hosted Jesus at another dinner party silently grumbled that Jesus permitted himself to be touched by a sinful woman who washed his feet with her hair (7:36–50; compare Mark 14:3–5, where the target of criticism is a woman who anointed Jesus). Although we can debate the meanings of the corporal intimacy in this latter example, Simon's disapproval of Jesus' laxity in letting a sinful woman touch him suggests that we should not ignore the physical and potentially eroticized intimacy implicit in that represented encounter.¹

I do not intend to explore Lukan or Johannine treatments of Jesus' presence at banquets. Instead, I would like to gesture toward another question. How would a Christian man of the late second or early third century have

responded to a woman who attempted to wash his feet with her tears and dry them with her hair?

Communal dining was central to early Christian practice, perhaps in part not only because Jesus had modeled such behavior, but also because of the centrality of common meals in Greco-Roman cultures. Although we may see parallels between Gospel representations of Jesus reclining at meals and accounts of later Christians gathered to dine and to worship together, I would suggest that in at least one significant way the dining Jesus did not serve as an exemplar for Christian communities. Gospel passages that link Jesus and banqueting hint at a high degree of ease with dining practices, whereas Christian writers entertained reservations about implicit dangers of the banquet setting. We may even speculate that, like the Pharisee named Simon in the Gospel of Luke, some theologians would have looked askance at Jesus' willingness to allow an unknown woman to caress his feet with her hair.

Although the dinner party was central to the common life of Christian communities, the sensuousness of the banquet setting proved fraught with peril.

Dreadful Dining

Early Christians claimed that their enemies charged them with an extreme breach of dining ethics, notably, dining on infants. The charge exists in various forms.² Most references to the cannibalism charge are brief, but in some sources, the charge is elaborated. Cannibalistic dining is said to be followed by incestuous sex, which transpires in the dark after dogs knock over candlesticks, the dogs having been tempted with bits of meat to enact this wicked trick: "We are spoken of as utter reprobates and are accused of having sworn to murder babies and to eat them and of committing adulterous acts before the repast. Dogs, you say, the pimps of darkness, overturn candles and procure license for our impious lusts" (Tertullian, *Apol.* 7.1).³ The setting for the unspeakable behavior is a symposium, with men and women apparently reclining together. Tertullian imagines what instructions for such a meal might include: "Meanwhile, as you recline at table, note the place where your mother is, and your sister; note it carefully, so that, when the dogs cause darkness to fall, you may make no mistake" (8.3).

Alleged activities at Christian feasts thus include perverse versions of corporeality—consuming bloody infant corpses—and of intimacy—sexual relations between men and their wives or sisters. Christian repetition of these charges evokes latent fears of ever-present danger inherent in the pleasures of dining, danger associated with the temptations of food and sex, here

imagined in terms of horror. In repudiating the charges, Christian authors hurl insults back at the wider pagan world. The stories of Greek and Roman gods and heroes, for example, include plenty of tales of cannibals enjoying “Thyestean feasts.” Moreover, as a result of indiscriminate promiscuity, men are said to unwittingly frequent prostitutes who are their offspring; by implication, pagan men cannot claim that they know themselves to be innocent of incest. In contrast, Tertullian pointedly notes, Christians practice chastity (9.19).

In the *Octavius* of Minucius Felix, with which Tertullian may have been familiar, the familiar charge of incest takes this form: “On the appointed day, they assemble for their banquets with all their children, sisters, and mothers—people of both sexes and every age” (9.6). The assembled consume rich food, and they drink until their dreadful desires boil over. Minucius’s steamy version of the incest charge thus includes a brief reference to the effects of drinking, a standard feature of symposia and a standard trope in discourse related to the symposium, as contributing to the debauchery to come. Indeed, excessive consumption of food and drink is implicitly a component of the debauchery. The charge continues. Having sated their appetites for food and drink, Christians exploit the shamelessness of darkness to sate their sexual appetites in random and anonymous couplings, not even knowing if they thereby commit incest (9.7).

Like Tertullian, Minucius alleges that all pagan men are complicit in incest because of the possibility, however remote, of copulating with one’s own abandoned offspring. By contrast, Minucius assures the reader, Christian men are faithful to their wives (31.5). Minucius offers a thumbnail sketch of a Christian banquet. “The banquets we conduct are distinguished not only by their modesty, but also by their soberness. We do not indulge in sumptuous meals or produce good fellowship by drawn out wine bibbing, but hold in check our cheerful spirits by the sobriety of our manners,” the banqueters “chaste in conversation and even more chaste in body” (31.5). Minucius makes no attempt to deny that Christian banquets include women as well as men, all of whom may be inferred to sip and to converse.

Tertullian’s rebuttal of pagan charges includes a more extended sketch of what transpires when Christians gather to dine. He writes, “Now I myself will explain the practices of the Christian Church, that is, after having refuted the charges that they are evil, I myself will also point out that they are good” (*Apol.* 39.1), an overture that leads to (among other topics) his own description of Christians at table:

Our repast, by its very name, indicates its purpose. It is called by a name which to the Greeks means ‘love.’ Whatever it costs, it is gain to incur

expense in the name of piety, since by this refreshment we comfort the needy, not as, among you, parasites contend for the glory of reducing their liberty to slavery for the price of filling their belly amidst insults, but as, before God, greater consideration is given to those of lower station No one . . . [reclines at] table without first partaking of a prayer to God. They eat as much as those who are hungry take; they drink as much as temperate people need. They satisfy themselves as men who remember that they must worship God even throughout the night; they converse as men who know that the Lord is listening. After this, the hands are washed and lamps are lit, and each one, according to his ability to do so, reads the Holy Scriptures or is invited into the center to sing a hymn to God. This is the test of how much he has drunk. Similarly, prayer puts an end to the meal. From here they depart, not to unite in bands for murder, or to run around in gangs, or for stealthy attacks of lewdness, but to observe the same regard for modesty and chastity as people do who have partaken not only of a repast but of a rule of life (39.16–19).

How does Tertullian's description respond to the corporeality of dining culture? Like Minucius, Tertullian emphasizes moderation in food and drink and self-control in conversation. Minucius comments that at table Christians are chaste in conversation, but Tertullian goes further. As Christians converse, they know the Lord hears. Even before reclining, Tertullian informs the reader, Christians pray. Dining Christians enjoy music, but the music they enjoy consists of pious hymns. Moreover, the quality of the singer's performance should advertise the singer's sobriety, or at least the singer's moderate intake of wine. A Christian meal thus shares many features with a pagan meal, including the pleasures of food, drink, conversation, and music. At the same time, Tertullian wants to insist, a Christian meal has little to do with its pagan counterpart.⁴ Christians would not tolerate guests who are parasites, enduring insults in exchange for a place at the table. Unlike pagan dinner parties, which culminate in misbehavior in streets or bedrooms, Christian dinner parties end on notes of sobriety, order, and righteousness.

Minucius's and Tertullian's brief descriptions of self-controlled Christian symposia hint at an insight that receives more extensive attention from Clement of Alexandria. The symposium may be central to Christian identity and practice, but at the same time, the symposium is a dangerous place. The symposium is dangerous because of the varied pleasures of corporeality—food, drink, and eroticized intimacy. Excessive consumption of food and drink is a risk factor leading to proscribed sexual expression, but we should not underestimate the degree to which Christian authors viewed excessive consumption—of food, of drink—as itself a violation of community norms.

Dread of Dining: Clement of Alexandria

How to affirm the positive importance of conviviality while warning against the dangers of the table is a task Clement of Alexandria sets himself in the second book of *Christ the Educator* (*Paedagogus*). Clement's obsession with table manners has been ably—and humorously—handled by Blake Leyerle in her 1995 article, "Clement of Alexandria on the Importance of Table Etiquette."⁵ In preparing these notes, I have turned frequently to passages discussed by Leyerle. Her insights are unfailingly valuable. In framing questions about Clement's responses to corporeality and intimacy, I hope to further the discussion Leyerle has begun. Whereas Leyerle focuses on the intersection of etiquette and morality, in these notes I focus on Clement's at-times alarmed responses to corporeality, intimacy, and sexuality in dining culture.

Clement pictures the corporeality of the dining experience as at once inevitable and threatening. For Clement, the corporeal threats of dining begin with tempting odors and include indulgence in gastronomic delicacies, drinking in a way that betrays dignity, and even the physiological effects of digestion. Yes, the intimacy of the banquet setting and judgment-impairing effects of wine may lead to erotic transgressions, including indiscrete conversation, but food and drink are dangerous not only as conduits to bad behavior of a sexual kind. Eating and drinking are temptations as well as necessities, and Christians must guard against succumbing to gustatory pleasures.

Clement concedes the importance of commensality to the Christian life: "Festive gatherings of themselves do contain some spark of love, for from food taken at a common table we become accustomed to the food of eternity" (*Paed.* 2.1.7).⁶ Christians should turn to Jesus, Clement teaches, for a dining and drinking exemplar. Was Jesus shameless in his consumption? By no means, Clement assures us. Jesus had excellent table manners. "From the things he taught about banquets, he plainly insisted that one who drinks must keep self-control. He set the example by not drinking freely himself" (2.2.32). At the same time, the fact that Jesus is reported to consume wine should be a rebuke to those who, like the Encratites, are said to refuse wine.

So Christians should recline together, and dine together, and drink together, and converse together, and sing together; but that reclining and dining and drinking and talking and music-making must manifest a kind of corporal self-control that Clement sees as atypical for banquets in his day. The good cheer arising from a cup of cheer (*Paed.* 2.4.43.1) must be appropriate to a feast of reason. Clement specifically addresses the kind of

music, the tenor of conversation, and even the quality of laughter in which Christians should indulge. He complains that at other dinner parties, an excess of drink leads to drunken confession of love affairs. "But love affairs and drunkenness are both contrary to reason, and therefore do not belong to our sort of celebrations" (*Paed.* 2.4.40). Flutes, harps, and castanets have no place at a Christian banquet, for Clement regards these as immodest instruments that assault the eye and ear and so emasculate listeners (*Paed.* 2.4.41). When Christians gather to drink they should instead raise their voices in hymns of praise, perhaps accompanied by lute or lyre. This is not a blanket endorsement of singing, of course. No love-songs allowed. Melodies may corrupt; the instrument of the voice should not be used in an over-delicate fashion. Clement relegates such pleasures to the world of prostitutes (*Paed.* 2.4.44). Like other corporal pleasures of dining, the pleasures of music are thus not proscribed but circumscribed.

Clement's recommendations for a controlled aural environment include limitations not only on what can be spoken—no obscene talk, no trivialities, and no bickering—and how loudly one may laugh but also on a variety of other nonverbal noises, including whistling, hissing, finger-snapping, coughing, nose-blowing, and belching.⁷ Clement helpfully supplies careful instructions on how to burp as quietly as possible (*Paed.* 2.7.60). Hint: A mouth wide open may invite moral decline, whether that gaping mouth is engaged in belching, racy talk, or overeating.⁸ As he says with contempt of a glutton, "a man of this sort seems nothing more than one great mouth" (*Paed.* 2.1.4). The corporal control incumbent on "rational animals" extends even to control of facial muscles in laughter. The Christian is not gloomy, nor does the Christian laugh loudly or uncontrollably. Clement advises that "the proper relaxation of the features within due limits—as though the face were a musical instrument—is called a smile . . . it is the good humor of the self-contained" (*Paed.* 2.5.46). The corporal pleasure of a shared laugh, though not proscribed, is circumscribed, for "laughter can easily give rise to misunderstandings, particularly among boys and women" (*Paed.* 2.5.47). Wine loosens laughter and morals in ways not only unbecoming but also unmanly and indecent. Easy talk and easy laughter betoken eroticized intimacy of which the Christian must be wary.

What is the greatest corporal temptation of the banquet? Although certainly aware of the sexual atmosphere and antics of the symposium, Clement seems to me at least as exercised about the temptations of food. He thus ridicules the postures and gestures of greedy men reclining at table. He excoriates the "fool" whose eyes become "enslaved" to "exotic delicacies." He continues, describing the fool "leaning forward" from the couch, "all but falling on one's nose into the dishes," or repeatedly "dipping one's hands"

or “stretching them out for some dish.” Such diners behave like livestock, he says.

They are in such a hurry to stuff themselves that both cheeks are puffed out at the same time, all the hollows of their face are filled out, and sweat even rolls down as they exert themselves to satisfy their insatiable appetite, wheezing from their intemperance, and cramming food into their stomachs with incredible energy, as though they were gathering a crop for storage rather than nourishment. (*Paed.* 2.1.11)

The corporal movements associated with drinking come in for equal critique.

We should drink without turning our head about, without swallowing all we can hold, without feeling compelled to roll our eyes around in the presence of the drink, and without draining the cup in one gulp with utter lack of self-control; thus we will not wet our chin or our clothes as we tip the cup all at once, practically washing or bathing our face in it. (*Paed.* 2.2.31)

The reader is unlikely to be surprised by Clement’s disgust at slurping noises.

The dangers of sexuality are also present at banquets, although Clement would deal with those dangers, when possible, by curbing the participation of women and young men in banquets where wine flows freely.⁹ Restricting participation of women and young men is not only for their own protection, but also to keep them from tempting grown men. A man should never share a couch with another man’s wife. Married women who have reason to be present at a banquet should be properly cloaked, and unmarried women should never appear. (At Christian gatherings organized around food and wine, it is unclear to me how Clement would respond to women’s participation.) While Clement allows that he would like to keep young men away from at least some banquets, he has suggestions for how a young man who does attend might properly comport himself: “And as for the young men, let them keep their eyes fixed on their own couch, lean on their elbow without too much fidgeting, and be present only with their ears. If they should be sitting down, let them not put their feet one on top of the other, nor cross their legs, nor rest their chin on their hands” (*Paed.* 2.7.54).

In his description of a woman drinking, Clement’s distaste for the physicality of eating and drinking merges with a condemnation of sexual displays, however limited, in the banquetting context. As for women, Clement writes:

If only they would not keep their lips wide open as they drink from big cups, with their mouths distorted out of shape! And if only they would not lean their heads back when they drain vessels narrow of neck, thereby exposing their throats with—or so it seems to me—such immodesty! They hold their chins high as they pour the drink down, as if they were trying to reveal as much of themselves as they can to their companions at table; then they belch like men, or rather, like slaves, and at their carousals begin to play the coquet. (*Paed.* 2.2.33)

The description includes themes we have already seen in Clement's writing, including his moral qualms about open mouths and his indignation at those who belch. Beyond that, however, Clement focuses on the physical process of drinking as a site of improper pleasure both for the drinking woman and for her (male) companions, who may be titillated by the site of a woman lifting cup to mouth.

At the outset of my treatment of Clement I noted that on his view the corporeal danger of dining includes the physiological process of digestion itself. This trepidation about the danger of digestion is implicit in his most notorious physiological observation, his approving citation of statement attributed to Valentinus concerning Jesus' exemplary dining self-control: "He ate and drank in a way individual to himself without excreting his food. Such was his power of self-control that the food was not corrupted within him, since he was not subject to corruption" (*Strom.* 3.7.59).¹⁰ Leyerle notes that it was "quite otherwise at the banquets of the wealthy. There the luxury attendant upon excretion matched that of ingestion. In visible use were silver urinals, alabaster chamber pots, and waste receptacles of gold."¹¹ Clement is vexed not only by luxury products employed for human waste, but also by the wastefulness of the process by which foodstuffs are transformed into excrement (*Paed.* 2.1.4). Of the dissolute, he charges that their lives are a meaningless cycle of symposia, "drunken headaches, baths, undiluted wine, chamber-pots, idleness, and drinking" (*Paed.* 2.2.25). Yet at the same time he recommends a bit of wine, which he claims can warm the innards as a welcome laxative (*Paed.* 2.2.24). Why should Clement care about the Christian's constipation? Perhaps because of a moral sensibility lost in the modern age. "Lusts," Clement instructs, "are aroused when the excrement gathers about the organ of generation, and therefore the excess must be dissolved and absorbed by digestion" (*Paed.* 3.11.66).¹² Clement's worries about the corporeality of dining culture feature not only sexuality and intimacy, but also about the temptations of the table and the regrettably inevitable aftermath of indulgence.¹³

Conclusions

Caveat: These notes on Christian responses to the corporeality, intimacy, and sexuality of ancient dining culture have focused on a handful of Christian writers, and among those writers, I have focused disproportionately on Clement of Alexandria. We should not imagine that these writers speak for all Christians of their era. Nonetheless, consistent themes emerge from their writing. Commensality is a good thing. It is good to eat together. It is also good, perhaps after a glass or two of diluted wine, to raise voices to praise the deity. Nonetheless, the dining room is not an innocent or safe space. The dining experience is potentially corrupting, not least because eating, digesting, and eliminating are part of the cycle of corporal corruption that characterizes mortal life. I believe that from our modern perspectives we may be readiest to acknowledge those early Christian concerns about corporeality that arise from issues of intimacy and sexuality. However, such concerns, certainly present in the authors we have considered, run concurrent with concerns regarding other corporeal pleasures.¹⁴

Notes

1. Charles H. Cosgrove, who sets out to “clarify the social meaning of the woman’s gesture with her hair,” resolutely argues against an eroticized interpretation of the scene. In the course of Cosgrove’s argument, he amply demonstrates that a woman’s unbound hair could carry many meanings in the Greco-Roman world. On my view, he is less successful in downplaying the physical and potentially eroticized intimacy of the scene. Simon’s disdain is key. Cosgrove argues that Simon’s response is conditioned by the identity of woman as a sinner—which a prophet should have intuited—rather than her actions. This seems to me rather too fine a distinction. Something about the woman touching Jesus disturbs the host. See “A Woman’s Unbound Hair,” esp. p. 675).
2. See, for example, Justin Martyr, *1 Apol.* 26; *2 Apol.* 12; Athenagoras, *Leg.* 3; Tatian, *Orat.* 25; Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 9, Tertullian, *Nat.* 1.7, 1.8, and 1.15, and *Apol.* 7, 8.
3. Trans. Arbesmann, Daly, and Quain.
4. See discussion in Grimm, *From Feasting to Fasting*, 118–121.
5. Leyerle, “Importance of Table Etiquette,” 123–141.
6. Trans. Simon P. Wood.
7. Clement knows more arcane corporal pleasures. He writes that “scratching the ear and irritations to prompt sneezing are gestures proper to swine, suggestive of the search for immoral pleasures” (*Paid.* 2.7.60).
8. Leyerle writes, “As a bodily orifice, mouths demand cautious and respectful treatment. Clement’s comment that the gluttonous resemble ‘nothing more than one great jaw’ not only arouses revulsion, but also raises the unpleasant

possibility of prandial violence. In addition, one unregulated orifice may conjure up another" ("Importance of Table Etiquette," 129).

9. Buell observes that "Clement depicts the process of becoming a Christian as analogous with conception, birth, and life development of a well-born free man" (*Making Christians*, 119). In Clement's writings, Buell writes, "well-born, wealthy free men become the standard for Christian existence," although at the same time "membership of Christianity and the lived experiences of Christianity exceeded the boundaries of this system" (130).
10. Trans. John Ferguson.
11. Leyerle, "Importance of Table Etiquette," 129–130.
12. See Grimm, *From Feasting to Fasting*, 108.
13. Of indirect relevance is Tertullian's observation that it can be no accident that the digestive organs are located so close to genitalia (*Jejun.* 1.1).
14. Shaw traces these concerns through late antiquity (*The Burden of the Flesh*).

CHAPTER 16

A Valentinian Response to the Culture of Reclining

Ellen Bradshaw Aitken

Let me begin with an unscholarly and contemporary reflection. As I worked through the Valentinian material, I was reminded of the following sort of experience: at some time in your life, you have perhaps had dining companions or dinner guests who have gone through the entire dinner party seemingly without taking any notice of their surroundings, the décor of the dining room or restaurant, the table settings, the food on the plates before them, or the wine in their glasses. The conversation at the meal has been lively, it has been a good dinner party, and everyone has enjoyed each other's company, but the arrangements and composition of the meal itself seem to have escaped notice. I would not speculate too much on the reasons—your friends are not boors, after all—but it may be because there has been business to do over the meal or the ideas have been flying fast and furiously, or the meal may be simply a precursor to the rest of the evening's entertainments or intimacies.

In brief, the Valentinians—at least as they are reflected or refracted in the texts that are reasonably taken as having an association with Valentinus or with the Valentinian school—would appear to be somewhat like these dinner guests. That is, the very short answer to the question posed for this paper is that *there is no Valentinian response to the culture of reclining at meals, or at least that there is no such response evident in the texts that we have*. What I shall do therefore in this paper is, first, to discuss why we might hope to

find some traces of meal practice among the Valentinians, and, second, to outline my approach in attempting to answer this question. I shall then turn to a discussion of the one text, possibly Valentinian, which may allude to a culture of reclining at meals. Finally, I shall take up the question of what this almost complete silence signifies and what we are to make of it.

The reason why we might hope to find some traces of meal practice among the Valentinians is that Valentinian texts display significant interest in ritual practice, more so than many of their contemporaries. In particular, a number of Valentinian texts refer to or reflect upon baptism, anointings, the laying on of hands, and the ritual of the “bridal chamber.” In addition, there are passing references to the eucharist,¹ although the eucharist itself appears not to be a basis for Valentinian theological reflection. Valentinian eucharistic practice also is one of the objects of heresiological attack by Irenaeus against the Valentinian Marcus (*Haer.* 1.13.2).² Valentinian texts from Nag Hammadi are richer with ritual references than most of the other texts in that corpus. Thus discussions of ritual practices among heterodox groups in early Christianity have tended to place some emphasis on Valentinianism. A second reason to hope to find traces of meal practice among Valentinians is that with some certainty it is possible to count the “school” of Valentinus among the groups in Rome in the middle of the second century CE. Alongside Justin Martyr and Marcion, Valentinus was probably the leader of a school and/or a house church in the city of Rome.³ This situation leads us to think in terms of social grouping, social and ritual practice, and social location; because of Justin’s portrayal of Christian meal practice in *1 Apology* 65 and in light of the eucharistic references in texts associated with Valentinus’s followers, it becomes reasonable to hope that Valentinian material might yield some information specifically about bodily posture at meals.

A word about my method of proceeding is in order. I have delimited a corpus of texts that are generally associated with Valentinus and his followers. These are as follows:

- a) Fragments of Valentinus contained in other authors;⁴
- b) *Summer Harvest* (a hymn attributed to Valentinus);⁵
- c) Two Valentinian inscriptions from Rome;⁶
- d) *Gospel of Truth* (NHC I,3);
- e) *Gospel of Philip* (NHC II,3);
- f) *Tripartite Tractate* (NHC I,5);
- g) *Treatise on the Resurrection* (NHC I,4);
- h) *(First) Apocalypse of James* (NHC V,3);
- i) *Interpretation of Knowledge* (NHC XI,1);

- j) *A Valentinian Exposition* (NHC XI,2);⁷
- k) Ptolemy *Letter to Flora*;
- l) *Excerpta ex Theodoto*.
- m) Heracleon's *Commentary on the Gospel of John* (fragments).

For the purposes of this investigation, I have not examined in detail the portrayals of the Valentinians by the heresiologists since it would be difficult to isolate a "Valentinian response" to a culture of reclining from the cultural expectations of the heresiologists.⁸ As I have examined these texts, I have been alert to any mention of reclining specifically in the context of other ritual or dining contexts. In addition, I have searched for any use of "reclining" used as a metaphor in the theological discourses of these texts. This second step is necessary in order to understand whether and how the bodily practice of reclining at meals is engaged, adopted, contested, or negotiated in the conceptual world of Valentinian thought. I have also looked for references to dining rooms, triclinia, and gatherings for dining, including any discussions of communal eating and drinking.

I would note that I have excluded references to the bridal chamber from this investigation, except to attend to whatever dining references there may be in relation to the mention of the bridal chamber. The "bridal chamber" is an important locus in Valentinian writings, used metaphorically for both the human relationship with the divine and also, it would appear, as a name for a distinct ritual practice. I mention here only briefly *Gospel of Philip* 67.29–30, "The lord [did] everything in a mystery, a baptism and a chrism and a eucharist and a redemption and a bridal chamber." Even though weddings included feasts, the use of the bridal chamber in Valentinian writings is not associated with meals and indeed appears specifically focused on the intimate nuptial relationship, however spiritually or metaphorically apprehended. The bodily postures associated with the bridal chamber are not, in my view, the same postures as those associated with the meal or symposium. Moreover, whatever happens in the bridal chamber is not contrasted or compared with meal practices in the Valentinian texts.

The results of this investigation are disappointing. With the exception of one of the Valentinian inscriptions, which I shall discuss below, none of the texts I examined yielded any information at all that would help to identify a "response to a culture of reclining." Indeed these texts are remarkably silent about reclining; they do not mention it. References to the eucharist (or baptism or the bridal chamber, for that matter) do not include any mention of reclining or any other bodily posture. Reclining is not engaged metaphorically in Valentinian theological exposition or reflection. There are references

to eating or to being consumed, but none of these speaks of communal eating. Likewise, with the exception of one of the Via Latina inscriptions, no mention is made of dining rooms, triclinia, or gatherings for dining.

The one exception is the mid-second-century fragmentary marble inscription from the Via Latina in Rome:⁹

ἵτρα δ'έμοι παστῶν δαδουχοῦσιν συν(
)απίνας πεινοῦσιν ἐν ἡμετέροι(
)νοῦντες γενέτην καὶ υἱέα δοξάσον(
)γῆς ἔνθα μόνης καὶ ἀληθείης ῥύ(

Peter Lampe reconstructs the text as follows and translates it:

λουτρά δ'έμοι παστῶν δαδουχοῦσιν συν(
 εἰλαπίνας πεινοῦσιν ἐν ἡμετέροισι δόμοισι
 ὑμνοῦντες γενέτην καὶ υἱέα δοξάσοντες
 πηγῆς ἔνθα μόνης καὶ ἀληθείης ῥύσις εἴη
 Co(brothers) of the bridal chambers, celebrate with torches the (ba)ths
 for me; They hunger for (ban)quets in ou(r rooms);
 (La)uding the Father and praisin(g) the Son;
 O, may there be flow(ing) of the only (sp)ring and of the truth in that
 very place.

A Valentinian context for this inscription has been argued by M. Guarducci and Lampe, following the suggestion of Manlio Simonetti. Lampe further tests and refutes the response of C. Scholten that the inscription is not Christian, Valentinian, or religious, but rather a pagan, nonreligious, wedding inscription.¹⁰ Recognizing that its Valentinian context is not secure, I nonetheless include it here as the one reference to a culture of dining from among the group of possibly Valentinian texts.

The key words are in the second line: *εἰλαπίνας* (“banquets”) and *δόμοισι* (“rooms, chambers, houses”: Lampe here draws upon the epic usage of the *δόμος*). It is important to note, however, that both words are reconstructions of lacunae. He suggests that an alternative possibility for the end of line 2 would be *ἀναγαίους* (“dining rooms”) but this is slightly too long for the space.

The inscription itself is composed in dactylic hexameters, the meter of epic. It is displayed, according to Lampe, in a “suburban villa”; he speculates that it was “displayed in the room where the baptisms took place.” Lampe uses this inscription along with the second Via Latina inscription, the acrostic grave inscription for Flavia Sophe, also argued to belong to a Valentinian

context, as part of his argument for that Valentinians in Rome belonged among the “socially privileged.”¹¹

For our purposes, if we grant the Valentinian context for this inscription, it provides us with evidence that Valentinians (or *these* Valentinians) participated in a banqueting culture that took place in houses. It would appear here that banquets were part of a ritual complex that included baptisms or baths, hymns, and the bridal chamber. This coheres with the passing indications to ritual in other Valentinian texts. In terms of a Valentinian *response* to a culture of reclining, however, it must be noted that reclining *per se* is not mentioned and can only be assumed as proper to the banquet. What is evident is that reclining is not the subject of reflection, contestation, refutation, negotiation, or the establishment of boundaries or communal identity in this or any other Valentinian text.

What are we to make of this silence? I would suggest two options. The first is that Valentinians did not recline at meals and also did not take it as a point of differentiation from Roman culture or from other Christian groups. I think this option is unlikely, since I would expect that reclining (or not) would appear as a point of contestation in the texts, given the apparent habitual and normal practices of the social context. Moreover, I would expect that not-reclining would also become a site for Valentinian theological reflection, which we do not see.

The second option is that Valentinians, like most of their contemporaries in the Roman world, reclined at meals, thought nothing special of it, and thus did not adopt it as a discursive site for their theology. I would also observe that we do not have any narrative texts from Valentinians. That is, if we had stories, then we might find, as we do in the narrative gospels, portrayals of reclining of meals but where this bodily posture is not otherwise engaged. Perhaps, moreover, the emphasis in Valentinian “social” life lay more in the school practices, the discursive, the speculative, and even in those intimacies that came after the meal, that is, with the bridal chamber.

Notes

1. *A Valentinian Exposition* 43, 20–38; 44, 1–37; *Gospel of Philip* 56, 67; *Excerpta ex Theodoto* 13.4; 82.1.
2. Irenaeus’s complaint against Marcus here pertains to Marcus’s practice of consecrating cups of wine, involving women in the consecration, and the mediation of prophecy by what he does with the cups. There is no mention of reclining. Moreover, we should exercise caution before taking Irenaeus’s words as an accurate description of Valentinian practice.
3. See the discussion in Thomassen, “Orthodoxy and Heresy in Second-Century Rome”; and Peter Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, 292–318.

4. I have here followed Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, 229–245.
5. Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, 246–248.
6. See Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, 298–311; these are (1) a mid-second-century marble inscription from the Via Latina and (2) a late second- or early-third-century marble grave inscription for Flavia Sophe, also from the Via Latina.
7. I follow here the list provided in Dunderberg, “The School of Valentinus,” 84.
8. A brief investigation has not yielded any material relevant to this question.
9. See Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, 298–299, who cites the initial publication of the inscription and the subsequent discussions.
10. See Scholten, “Gibt es Quellen zur Sozialgeschichte der Valentinianer Roms?”
11. Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, 313.

CHAPTER 17

Monastic Meals: Resisting a Reclining Culture¹

Lillian I. Larsen

Interpretive renderings have long viewed the mundane details of early monastic life through hagiographical lenses. In discourse where demonology has proved decidedly more interesting than dining norms, almost every analysis is residually informed by scholarly trajectories that have construed early monastic practice as uniformly distinctive. A persistent habit of reading hagiography as history, and derivatively, framing the habits of the earliest monks as unprecedented, retains a stubborn influence on even the most critical approaches.² Scholars Cornelia Römer and Stephen Emmel note that for any who seek to re-create a less-idealized picture of early monastic life, the residual effect of the dismemberment and dispersal of monastic texts and artifacts into museum collections around the world must be taken into account. Just as the fragmentary nature of extant sources has left ample room for far-ranging, mythic reconstructions, so competing economic and academic interests have often dictated what is preserved, and/or disseminated. Discussing the re-assemblage of material and manuscript evidence that derives *just* from the White Monastery in Upper Egypt, Römer and Emmel describe the work as akin to putting together “a large puzzle.”³ Although studies that recognize the importance of linking text and context have grown decidedly more nuanced, larger than life constructs grounded in historically persuasive hagiography, and at best, fragmentary material remains, have proved surprisingly difficult to dismantle.

Offering a counterpoint to the exemplary narratives of larger than life luminaries that dominate the hagiographical landscape of early monastic literature, there exists a complementary template of monastic mores refracted in decidedly life-sized dimensions. Loosely framed as “rules,” these documents are preserved in a range of guises.⁴ Differently idealized, they document the rhythms of early monastic life in a literary form that has often escaped uniform scrutiny. They likewise offer a particularly rich store of source material for exploring early monastic meal traditions. Here one encounters norms that are, at once, emerging from, and in tense negotiation with, wider meal conventions. Nonetheless, even as refectories replace *triclinia* as loci of social experimentation, the semantics of meal practice remain surprisingly static.

Early Monastic Rules

It is the case that the “origins” of Christian monastic practice are as widely debated as the “origins” of Christianity. There is, however, a measure of consensus in dating the earliest monastic Rules to the fourth through sixth centuries of the Common Era. With respect to meal practice, three strata of early Rules are of particular interest. The first generation that will be treated here includes: (1) a rather loose collection of instructions attributed to the acclaimed “father” of *anachoretic* monasticism, Antony of Egypt (*Reg. Ant.*); (2) a *Longer* (*Reg. Fus.*) and a *Shorter Rule* (*Reg. Brev.*), each credited to Basil of Caesarea, founder of the Cappadocian strain of Christian monastic practice; and (3) a set of *Precepts* (*Praec.*) linked to Pachomius, the Cenobitic counterpart of Antony, and founder of a burgeoning network of Egyptian communal establishments. Applying the lens of meal practice to these documents lends interesting and unexpected weight to arguments for their foundational nature.

A second generation of legislation, the *Institutes* (*Inst.*) of John Cassian, registers the trajectory of monastic practice as it moves to the West. While Cassian does not explicitly frame these directives as a rule, his *Institutes* mark a point of transition, serving as conduits of “Eastern” norms. A third generation is composed of the elaborate *Rule of the Master* (*Reg. Mag.*) and Benedict’s simpler *Rule for Beginners* (*Reg. Ben.*) Both are foundational in grounding the long trajectory of Western Rules.⁵

The Rule of Antony (Pispir, Egypt ~313 CE)

The attribution and provenance of the “Rule of Antony” is widely contested.⁶ However, whether or not this loose set of injunctions links to the illustrious figure of Antony, the content of the rule, particularly with respect

to meal practice, evidences striking affinity with the prescriptions one might expect to find at a point when the frameworks that came to define monastic life were at an emergent stage. Eleven of the fifty-seven admonitions included in this seemingly random collection of cryptic exhortations touch on some aspect of meal practice.⁷ A number of these directives articulate norms broadly echoed across a range of disparate rule collections. For example, excepting Saturday and Sunday, Antony's companions are instructed to "fast every day until the ninth hour" (*Reg. Ant.* 3). They are directed "never to eat meat" (*Reg. Ant.* 20), or in fact, anything "to satiation" (*Reg. Ant.* 52). Echoing ideals that link this rule with wider Christian and monastic mores, they are encouraged to "go among the ill and the feeble and fill their vases with water" (*Reg. Ant.* 55).⁸

Other directives are particular to this body of instructions. One precept enjoins: "Do not eat with someone who pays for you" (*Reg. Ant.* 14). Another commands: "Do not make a feast and do not go to a feast" (*Reg. Ant.* 30). A third mandates: "If you pay for an agape do not show yourself" (*Reg. Ant.* 34). A fourth instructs the one who "assists at an agape, [to] eat and give thanks to God" (*Reg. Ant.* 35).⁹

Per the persuasive hagiography of Athanasius' *Vita Antonii*, tradition has framed both Antony and his community as a-literate rustics "taught only by God" (*Vit. Ant.* 1). Although a sustained counter-reading has argued for communal practice that more closely replicates the norms of a philosophical school setting,¹⁰ it is the "rustic" caricature of Antony and his followers that has long captured the imagination.¹¹ In intriguing ways, the references to meal practice within this early Rule challenge simple dichotomies. The routine manner in which included admonitions assume interaction with wider meal settings situates this monastic community at a nexus of Greco-Roman and Early Christian tradition. While no particular posture is noted, the absence of such detail presumes a recognizable frame of reference. For the members of this community, meal codes are well established. They require little further elucidation.

The Longer and Shorter Rules of Basil (–370 CE)

In contrast to the cryptic exhortations ascribed to Antony, the body of monastic rules attributed to Basil of Caesarea provides a surprisingly detailed record of fourth century monastic mores. Formulated as a *Longer* and *Shorter Rule*, Basil's instructions are likewise the earliest to survive in Greek. Most scholars have argued that the *Longer Rule* predates the *Shorter*, since the latter references the former throughout.¹² Traditionally, it has been suggested that Basil began composing his collections following a tour of the

monastic establishments of Egypt and Syria. Those who premise this early date, posit that the rules were intended to guide a Pontus community, organized in the 360s. Others date the rules to the following decade, when Basil succeeded Eusebius as Bishop of Caesarea (370 CE), and over the course of nine years in this position, is said to have organized monastic life in and around the city.¹³

In his homily “On Renunciation of the World,” Basil commends a progressive approach to adopting the monastic life.¹⁴ Reflecting a degree of discipline, at some remove from more conventional refractions of the ascetic life, he enjoins his audience to avoid accumulating a heavy burden of sin “by having too soft of a bed or the style of [one’s] garments, or shoes, or any other part of . . . dress; by variety in food, or a table too richly appointed for [one’s] stage of self-renunciation, by the way [one] stand[s] or sit[s], or by being negligent or too fastidious with regard to manual labor” (*Ren. Mundi*).

In the context of this homily, Basil likewise addresses the sexual temptations inherent to the common life, particularly those encountered in the meal setting:

If you are youthful in body or mind, fly from intimate association with comrades of your own age and run away from them as from fire (νέος ὢν εἴτε τὴν σάρκα εἴτε τὸ φρόνημα, φεῦγε τὴν συνδιαγωγὴν τῶν ὁμηλικίων, καὶ ἀποδίδρασκε ἀπ’ αὐτῶν ὡς ἀπὸ φλογόν). The Enemy has, indeed, set many aflame through such means and consigned them to the eternal fire, casting them down into that loathsome pit of five cities (Gen. 10.19; Deut. 29.23) on the pretext of spiritual love. Even those who have come safely through every wind and tempest on the sea and are safe in port he has sent down into the deep, together with ship and crew. At meals take a seat far away from your young brother; in lying down . . . let not your garments be neighbor to his; rather have an elderly brother lying between you (ἐν καθέδρᾳ πρὸ πολλοῦ καθέσθῃτι ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ. ἐν ἀνακλίσει ὕπνου μὴ γειτνιαζέτω σου τὰ ἐνδύματα τοῖς ἐκείνου. μᾶλλον δὲ κέχρησο γέροντι μεσίτῃ). When a young brother converses with you or is opposite you in choir, make your response with your head bowed lest, perchance, by gazing fixedly into his face, the seed of desire be implanted in you by the wicked [s]lower and you reap sheaves of corruption and ruin (*Ren. Mundi*).

The twenty-first of the *Longer Rule*’s 55 chapters weaves a treatise on monastic humility (and respect for authority) into guidelines for maintaining appropriate demeanor at the community meal. Responding to the query: “how one ought to conduct oneself with regard to sitting and reclining at the

midday meal or at supper” (πῶς δεῖ περὶ τὰς καθέδρας καὶ τὰς κατακλίσεις ἐν τῷ καιρῷ τῶν ἀρίστων ἢ δείπνων ἔχειν), Basil instructs:

Since it is a precept of the Lord, who on all occasions habituates us to humility, that we should take the lowest place in reclining at meals (τὸ ἐν τοῖς ἀρίστοις κατακλινομένους τὸν ἔσχατον τόπον προκαταλαμβάνειν), he who strives to do all according to injunction must not neglect this precept (Luke 14.10). If any worldlings, therefore, should recline with us (ἂν μὲν οὖν κοσμικοὶ τινες ἡμῖν συγκατακλίνωνται), it behooves us to be an example in this matter by not exalting ourselves above others or seeking to have the first place (τὸ φιλόπρωτον ἐπιζητεῖν). But when all who thus gather together are in pursuit of the same goal, each one, so that at every opportunity they may give proof of their humility, has an obligation of being [first] in taking the last place (προτοκαταλαμβάνειν τὸν ἔσχατον τόπον) according to the Lord’s command. To engage in rivalry and strife in this matter is unseemly, because it destroys good order and is a cause of tumult. Moreover, if we are not willing to yield to one another and conflict arises over it, we shall be classed with those who quarrel over the first places (ὁμοίους ἡμᾶς ποιήσει τοῖς περὶ πρωτείων φιλονεικοῦσι). In this sphere, also, prudently aware of and attentive to what befits us, we therefore should leave the order of seating to the one entrusted with this duty (ἐπιτρέπειν τῷ ὑποδεχομένῳ καὶ τὴν τῆς κατακλίσεως τάξιν), as the Lord declared when he said that the arrangement of these matters pertains to the master of the house (Luke 14.10). In this way, we shall support one another in charity (Eph. 4.2), doing all things decently and according to order (I Cor. 14.40). Also, we will not give the impression, by stubborn and vigorous opposition, that we are trying to appear humble in order to impress the company or to win popular favor, but rather we will practice humility by being obedient. To engage in altercation, indeed, is a surer sign of pride than to accept the first place when directed to do so (*Reg. Fus.* 21).

In the derivative *Shorter Rule*, banqueting language is again employed, this time to promote the meal as a site for nourishing both body and soul. Responding to the query: “With what disposition and attention ought [one] listen to what is read . . . at meal times?” (μετὰ ποταπῆς διαθέσεως καὶ προσοχῆς ὀφείλομεν ἀκούειν τῶν ἐν τῷ καιρῷ τῆς μεταλήψεως παραναγινωσκομένων ἡμῖν), Basil directs his monastic constituents to attend “[w]ith far greater pleasure than [they] eat and drink, that the mind may be shown not to be distracted by the pleasures of the body (περισσότερως ἢ μεθ’ ὅας ἡδονῆς ἐσθίομεν καὶ πίνομεν, ἵνα δειχθῇ ὁ νοῦς μὴ μετεωριζόμενος

εἰς τὰς τοῦ σώματος ἡδονᾶς), but delighting in the words of the Lord, in fashion like unto him who said: ‘Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb’” (Ps. 19.10; *Reg. Brev.* 180).

The sexual mores that governed interaction at Basil’s table may have been more restrictive than the sexual mores encountered in the meal settings attached to more mainstream philosophical settings. Likewise, the focal topics that structured the community’s *symposia* may have been grounded in scripture, rather than the teachings of the philosophers. The monks in Basil’s community may well have competed for the *last place* at the table, rather than the first. However, there is little else to suggest that meal practice in the earliest Cappadocian establishments differed in any significant way from what one might have encountered in a wider philosophical school setting.¹⁵

The Precepts of Pachomius (~340–404 CE)

The various documents attributed to Pachomius, the “father” of Egyptian cenobitic monasticism are among the most widely recognized of the proto-Monastic rules. While the dates assigned the earliest communities are roughly contemporary with those ascribed to Antony, the five sets of rules attributed to Pachomius and his successor, Horsiesius, are preserved only as early fifth-century translations included among the writings of Jerome. At best, these Latin transcriptions capture the tenor of life in the Pachomian monasteries circa 404 CE some 60 years after the estimated founding of the original community.

In contrast to the ethos of self-modulated progression reflected in the rules attributed to Antony and Basil, the meal directives included among the Pachomian *Praecepta* register a tensive resistance to wider norms. As articulated, the *Precepts* mandate that diners “sit in order in [their] appointed places (*cum autem ad uescendum uenerint, sedebunt per ordinem statutis locis, et operient capita*), and cover their heads” (*Praec.* 29). If anyone “speaks or laughs while eating (*quod si aliquis uel locutus fuerit, uel riserit in uescendo*), he shall do penance and be rebuked there at once” (*Praec.* 31). Monks are not to “look around at others eating” (*Praec.* 30). When ordered by a superior “to pass from one table to another,” (*statimque cum tibi a maiore fuerit imperatum ut de alia mensa ad aliam transire debeas*), no “contradicting” is allowed (*Praec.* 30).¹⁶

Whether these more stringent norms afford measured access to the lived experience of the earliest strata of Pachomian monks remains a question.¹⁷ A roughly contemporary document, however, underscores the degree to which the guidelines articulated by the Pachomian leaders countered common practice. The *Historia Lausiaca* of Palladius tells the story of a rule of life that

ostensibly predates the *Precepts* that were in practice at the time of Palladius's writing (~419–420 CE). Per Palladius, these foundational instructions were inscribed on a bronze tablet and conveyed by heavenly messenger (*Hist. Laus.* 32.1). Delivered to Pachomius while he was sitting as a solitary in his cave (καθεζομένω αὐτῷ ἐν τῷ σπηλαίῳ), this “Angelic Rule” attended a divine injunction to “call young monks together and dwell with them” (ἐξελθὼν συνάγαγε πάντας τοὺς νέους μοναχοὺς καὶ οἴκησον μετ’αὐτῶν). The tablet included the following directives:

You will let each one eat and drink as suits his strength (συγχωρήσεις ἐκάστῳ κατὰ δύναμιν φαγεῖν καὶ πιεῖν); and divide up their tasks in accord with their respective strengths, and not hinder anyone from fasting or eating. Assign the more difficult tasks to the strong ones who eat and assign lesser tasks to those who are weak and more ascetic. Make separate cells in the cloister and let there not be three monks to a cell. Meals, however, should be taken by all in one house (ἡ δὲ τροφή πάντων ὑπὸ ἑνα οἶκον ἐξεταζέσθω).

Let them not recline at full length, but let them take their rest sitting down on their coverlets thrown over the backs of chairs (καθευδέτωσαν δὲ μὴ ἀνακείμενοι, ἀλλὰ θρόνους οἰκοδομητοὺς ὑπτιωτέρους πεποιηκότες καὶ θέντες αὐτῶν ἐκεῖ τὰ στρώματα καθευδέτωσαν καθήμενοι). At night they may wear lebitons. Let each one have a coat of goatskin; they may not eat without it (ἐκαστος αὐτῶν ἐχέτω μῆλωτὴν αἰγίαν εἰργασμένην, ἥς ἄνευ μὴ ἐσθιέτωσαν). On Saturday and Sunday, they may loosen their girdles and go in with the hood only (*Hist. Laus.* 32.2–3).

Like the loosely formulated “Rule of Antony,” it is striking that a significant portion of the “Angelic Rule” concerns itself with meal practice. As Pachomius’ communal mores address and negotiate the challenges of community formation in burgeoning establishments comprised of increasingly diverse populations, the added weight implicit in the *Precepts*’ derivation from an “Angelic Rule” suggests that the innovations introduced into the meal setting were so radical that they required divine authorization.

The *Institutes* of Cassian (Gaul 425–430 CE)

It is John Cassian who is traditionally credited with bringing “Eastern” monastic practice to the “West.” His teaching draws explicitly on experience that derives from a period of formation spent in the deserts of Egypt. As such, he is one of few “Western” figures whose presence is routinely attested among the various collections of *Apophthegmata Patrum* (the bodies

of sayings and stories ascribed to “Eastern” desert monks). His cenobitic *Institutes*, although not named as a rule, offer instruction to the monks under his jurisdiction in Marseilles. The format is similar to that encountered in more formal configurations of the genre.

As Cassian traces the lineage of norms “current” in his Gallic community, he claims both Egyptian and Cappadocian precedent in discussing meal practice. He places the two loci in conversation, even as he holds them in tension.

We know . . . that the reading of sacred texts in the cenobia while the brothers are eating follows the model of the Cappadocians rather than that of the Egyptians (*illud autem, ut reficientibus fratribus sacrae lectiones in coenobiis recitentur, non de Aegyptiorum typo processisse, sed de Cappadocum nouerimus*). There is no doubt that they wished to establish this not so much for the sake of spiritual discipline as in order to curb superfluous and vain chattering and especially arguments, which often arise during meals, seeing that they could not contain them among themselves otherwise (*quos nulli dubium est non tam spiritalis exercitationis causa, quam conpescendae superfluae otiosaeque confabulationis gratia et maxime contentionum, quae plerumque solent in conuiuio generari, hoc statuere uoluisse, uidentes eas aliter apud se non posse cohiberi*). For among the Egyptians, and in particular among the Tabennisians, all are so silent that, even though a large number of brothers are seated together for the purpose of eating, no one dares even whisper apart from the one who is in charge of his own group of ten, who nonetheless indicates by a sound rather than by a word if he notices that something must either be brought to or removed from the table. And so great is the discipline of silence that is observed while they are eating that, with their hoods drawn lower than their eyebrows lest a free view facilitate a roving curiosity (*tantaque uescentibus eis silentii huius disciplina seruatur, ut cucullis ultra oculorum palpebras demissis, ne scilicet liber aspectus habeat copiam curiosius euagandi*), they can see nothing more than the table and the food that is put on it or taken off of it. The result of this is that no one notices how or how much another person is eating (*Inst.* 4.17).

Here, the question of meal posture surfaces only implicitly. It is clear, however, that Cassian’s nomenclature is residually informed by wider banqueting culture. His directives simultaneously emphasize and obscure this broader frame, as the focus shifts from negotiating the practice of sitting and/or reclining to addressing a continuum of silence and/or speech.

The writings of Cassian, to some degree, mark the point at which the paths of Eastern and Western monastic development begin to diverge. In the East, the idea of a rule is preserved in loosely organized *Typika*, respectively formulated in distinct monastic settings. While these remain rooted in Basil's *Longer* and *Shorter Rules*, there is no uniform rubric that governs the shape of derivative guidelines.¹⁸ As Cassian's interpretation of Eastern practice gains a foothold in the West, the result is, in some sense, opposite. Here, as the traditions of the Cappadocians are interwoven with communal mores ascribed to the Egyptians, a common template emerges, and with it, a relatively fixed trajectory of monastic rules. Of these, the lengthy *Rule of the Master*, and Benedict's derivative *Rule for Beginners* are foundational.

The Rule of the Master (Rome, 475–525 CE)

The anonymous *Rule of the Master* is thought to reflect life in an Italian monastic community during the late fifth or early sixth century. Included within this lengthy document is a series of chapters devoted to meal etiquette. The *Master's* monastic guidelines, in some sense bring us full circle. With the exception of reclining, they address a meal setting not unlike that which one might expect to encounter in the banqueting hall of an aristocratic household:

When the whole community along with its shepherd has come from the oratory, after the verses and prayer the abbot seats himself in his chair at table. The whole community immediately answers, 'Thanks be to God,' and while all remain standing at their tables the basket hanging over the abbot's table is lowered with the pulley cord, to give the impression that the provisions of God's workmen are coming down from heaven (*mox omnis congregatio respondeat "Deo gratias", et omnibus adhuc ad suas mensas stantibus, canister supra mensam abbatis pendens trocleae fune descendat, ut a caelo uideatur operariis Dei annona descendere*). As soon as the basket has come down, the abbot makes a sign of the cross over the bread, breaks it, and takes first his own portion, which as he raises his hand will be blessed by the Lord; he sets out the portions for those who are standing before him at his table and who will eat with him, distributes it to them. Upon receiving it they kiss the abbot's hand and sit down in silence.

Then he calls up the deans of the tables and gives them the portions for their whole table. After these have been dismissed he calls up the others and gives them theirs. If, by the grace of God, the community is numerous he does the same for all the tables. Upon receiving the portions for themselves and their brothers, the deans kiss the abbot's hands to give

honor to the superior. Likewise when they themselves make distribution to the brothers at their tables, their hands are kissed by the brothers as a sign of humility, and after each one has received his portion he sits down in silence (*item cum ipsi in suis mensis fratribus suis erogant, pro humilitate manus eis a fratribus osculentur, et postquam quis acceperit, sedeat tacitus*). After all are seated, the weekly reader at table rises and receives his portion, kisses the hand of the one giving it, then hands it over to the cellarer, the weekly kitchen servers enter, receive their portions from their deans and kiss their hands. Meanwhile the cellarer, since he belongs to no deanery, receives his portions from the hand of the abbot. When he receives it he too kisses the hand of the giver and places [the bread] on his table (*Reg. Mag.* 23.1–14).

The rich detail that attends the commencement of this monastic meal is particularly multivalent. Read in isolation, the basket of bread lowered through an opening in the ceiling appears to be a dramatic reenactment of Scripture. Placed within a Greco-Roman meal setting, the same reconfigures an established system for delivering food to the banquet host in an aristocratic household.¹⁹ Such baskets were lowered by slaves into the *triclinium*. The food was here dispersed to other slaves, who in turn, served the guests. In the “Master’s” dining room these functions are assigned to various strata of monks; among them “weekly servers” who facilitate distribution of the “provisions of God’s workmen . . . coming down from heaven.”²⁰

The *Rule’s* description of the place of the “Weekly Reader in the Refectory” registers the resolution of Cassian’s dilemma. Conventions that adjudicate the place of conversation at the meal are fluidly reframed to address the needs of a new historical setting and moment:

Entry into each one’s week is to take place as follows: on Sunday, the same day the kitchen servers enter upon their week, at the meal at the sixth hour, after the verse and prayer at table, when the abbot is seated on his chair, before the basket with the customary bread has come down by the pulley cord, this brother who is to read presents himself by saying aloud: ‘Please my lords, pray for me because I am entering upon my week of reading at table’. Then the abbot rises with the entire community, and kneeling down they pray for him. And after they have risen, the new reader for the weeks says this verse: ‘O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall proclaim your praise’, and all respond together. As soon as this verse has been said and the abbot has finished, he gives the sign of peace first to the abbot, then to everyone. Then he provides a seat for himself in

the center of the refectory, and after all are seated at table he asks a blessing and likewise sits down at his place with the book (*deinde in medio omnium mensarum sibi ordinet sellam et post omnium sessionem ad mensas petita benedictione sedeat et ipse in sella cum codice*). After the abbot and all the others have received the first unmixed wine of the meal, he too in like manner receives his unmixed wine to prevent spitting out the sacrament (*et cum primum mensae abbas cum omnibus acceperit merum, et ipse similiter et suum merum propter sputum sacramenti accipiat et sic incipiat legere*), and then he begins to read (*Reg. Mag.* 24.6–14).

As with the distribution of food, elaborate ritual attends the reader's role within the meal. This protocol insures that "divine food will never be wanting at a carnal meal" (*ut numquam desit carnali refectio et esca diuina*) and that the brothers will be "doubly fed when they eat through the mouth and are nourished through the ears" (*Reg. Mag.* 24.4–5).

The task of reading the Rule, once finished, simply commenced again. Over successive weeks and "in daily sequence" the entire Rule was:

... read distinctly, not rapidly, so that the hearers while occupied [might] clearly understand what they must put into practice, and so that, should there be anything ambiguous or obscure that the brothers [did] not fully comprehend, the abbot [might] give explanations either on being questioned by the brother or by his own initiative (*et ut, si qua sunt ambigua aut obscura et apertius ea non intellegunt fratres, aut interrogatus a fratribus aut ultro aliqua abbas exponat*).²¹

The reading/mastication of the Rule, as articulated here, appears to preclude all discourse. However, read within the context of broader meal practice, the generative potential of questions and explanations that address points of "ambiguity" or "obscurity" is suggestive.²² An established monastic pattern of effectively continuing and reworking broader banqueting norms invites further speculation.

In both frame and content, the *Rule of the Master* reflects a milieu at once removed from and intimately linked to the discursive negotiation that attends the meal setting in its broader Greco-Roman, and Early Christian manifestations. Whether some portion of the literature that derives from an early monastic frame may be linked to attendant discourse focused on digesting the "divine food" of the Rule, is a question that merits further consideration.²³ The only thing obviously missing from this description of monks reclining "at table" is the element of reclining.

The Rule of Benedict (Monte Cassino, Italy ~540 CE)

As the detailed Basilian Rules ground the more particular Eastern *Typika*, so the comprehensive *Rule of the Master* grounds the more tightly structured *Rule of Benedict*. Simplifying the complex codification of the *Master's* instruction, Benedict's rule became the dominant monastic code not only for the community under his immediate jurisdiction at Monte Cassino, but over time, for all of Western Europe. Like his predecessors, it is supposed that Benedict composed the original portions of his Rule "as he went along." The directives added from year to year incorporated not only the wisdom gained from lived experience, but also the material gleaned from other sources and rules. While the Rule, as a distinct entity, is dated to the years immediately preceding Benedict's death (530–540 CE), it is first explicitly and independently referenced in the writings of Pope Gregory the Great some 50 years later.²⁴

Traditionally, the teachings of Basil, Pachomius, and Cassian have been credited with exerting particular influence on Benedict's thought. However, the common themes that link Benedict's Regulations to the *Rule of the Master* suggest that the latter may have served as a more immediate source. Benedict's instructions for the "Weekly Reader" succinctly simplify the protocol outlined in the *Rule of the Master*. As with previous progressions, Benedict's changes are, at once, subtle and significant:

Reading must not be wanting at the table of the brethren when they are eating (*mensis fratrum lectio deesse non debet*). Neither let anyone who may chance to take up the book venture to read there; but let him who is to read for the whole week enter upon that office on Sunday. After Mass and Communion let him ask all to pray for him that God may ward off from him the spirit of pride. And let the following verse be said three times by all in the oratory, he beginning it: "*Domine, labia mea aperies, et os meum adnuntiabit laudem tuam*" (Ps 50[51]:17), and thus having received the blessing let him enter upon the reading.

Let the deepest silence be maintained that no whispering or voice be heard except that of the reader alone (*et summum fiat silentium, ut nullius musitatio uel uox nisi solius legentis ibi audiat*). But let the brethren so help each other to what is needed for eating and drinking, that no one need ask for anything. If, however, anything should be wanted, let it be asked for by means of a sign of any kind rather than a sound. And let no one presume to ask any questions there, either about the book or anything else, in order that no cause to speak be given [to the devil] (Eph 4:27; 1 Tm 5:14), unless, perchance, the Superior wish[es] to say a few

words for edification (*nec praesumat ibi aliquis de ipsa lectione aut aliunde quicquam requirere, ne detur occasio; nisi forte prior pro aedificatione uoluerit aliquid breuiter dicere*).

Let the brother who is reader for the week take a little bread and wine before he begin[s] to read, on account of Holy Communion, and lest it should be too hard for him to fast so long. Afterward, however, let him take his meal in the kitchen with the weekly servers and the waiters. The brethren, however, will not read or sing in order, but only those who edify their hearers (*Reg. Ben.* 38).

For both the Master and Benedict, reading the Rule in the context of the meal, serves as a pedagogical device, bent on governing the community through shaping individual behavior. Read out loud, Benedict's precepts were inculcated into the lives of the monks, day by day, and over the length of a lifetime.

Reattaching Western practice to its Eastern roots, after the evening meal, Benedict recommends readings that complement the teachings of the Rule, in particular, Cassian's *Conferences* and the *Lives of the [Egyptian] Fathers* (*Reg. Ben.* 42).²⁵ Although Benedict, like the *Master*, is explicit in removing any hint of spontaneous discourse from the meal setting, one can imagine that "post-meal" readings may have afforded both listeners and readers the opportunity to range further afield. While ostensibly detached from the meal proper, the setting calls to mind something akin to a rather mild-mannered symposium.

Conclusion

The texts treated here suggest that, like their Greco-Roman, and proto-Christian counterparts, proto-Monastic meals provided contexts for "think[ing] about, experiment[ing] with and negotiat[ing] . . . social structures, personal relationships, and identity formation."²⁶ Arguably unique to this environment, however, is an institutional setting in which a monk's lived experience is itself infused with the utopian ideals of the meal locus.²⁷ This makes the monastic meal a particularly rich register. Exploring the question of posture at meals has served to elucidate the spectrum of tense negotiation that shaped the emergent rhythms of daily monastic life. Addressing a wider array of monastic rules, and/or meal elements, could (and perhaps should) fill the pages of a book length monograph. Patent already, however, is the degree to which the matter of meals effectively breathes life into the larger-than-life.

Notes

1. This essay was first presented in the Meals in the Greco-Roman World Seminar at the 2009 SBL Annual Meeting in New Orleans. My thanks to members of the seminar for their useful questions and comments. Andrew McGowan's work on *Ascetic Eucharists* shares the clearest points of tangency with the material covered here. However, in fascinating ways, intersections with the research of other members of this group have evoked provocative questions about the monastic meal context that hold rich promise for future work. I am grateful to the Wabash Center and Riksbanken Jubileumsfond for their financial support during the periods when this paper was being revised for publication.
2. Assertion of the "originality" of monastic convention is endemic to the tradition (Cf. Guy, "Educational Innovation," 44; Ward, *Sayings*, xix; Burton-Christie, *Word in the Desert*, 3). While claims of singularity are seductive, the "ring" of this commentary is hauntingly familiar when placed alongside the "myth [of] a 'uniquely' pristine 'original' Christianity which suffered later 'corruptions'" (Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 43). In fact, if one takes a step back from the intricacies of scholarly debate, the erudite search for origins within and among the monastic sources bears remarkable resemblance to the parallel "quest" for the origins of Christianity. In her work on the *Apocryphon of John*, Karen King notes that legitimacy is linked to a naïve and natural simplicity. Within this frame, the idealized innocence of the earliest followers of Jesus (or, here, the earliest monks) is understood as antithetical to the cosmopolitan complexity of literate culture. "Authenticity," often construed in moral terms, is equated with artless, ingenuous, and credulous textual expression. Borrowing—that is "syncretism"—stands in opposition to the purity of this "authentic" tradition. The perceived degree of "sophistication" that characterizes a particular text becomes at once a measure of its artifice (King, "Mackinations," 161).
3. Emmel and Römer, "Library of the White Monastery," 8.
4. The question of what constitutes a "rule" at this early stage is a matter of debate. The textual evidence suggests that nomenclature varies widely. The rules treated in this essay are variously preserved as "admonitions," "precepts," "institutes," and "canons." "Rules" are likewise incorporated into larger documents, framed as *Lives* or *Testaments*. In the East, later collections come to be known as "*Typika*," in the West, *Regulae*; cf. Thomas and Hero, *Monastic Foundation Documents*, 1–41.
5. De Vogüé addresses this dependence in his respective introductory discussions of the two rules. Thanks to Brian Møller Jensen of Stockholm University for pointing out that the council of Aachen in 816–817 made Benedict's the sole Rule for monasteries across the Carolingian Empire.
6. Further research on this, and other early bodies of instruction, is needed. To date, Antoine Mokbel provides the most detailed discussion of the particular injunctions ascribed to Antony, although Mokbel, himself, questions the Rule's attribution; Cf. Mokbel, "La Règle de Saint Antoine," 207–221.

7. *Reg. Ant.* 3, 7, 14, 19, 20, 21, 30, 34, 35, 52, 55.
8. Cf. Andrew Crislip, *From Monastery to Hospital*, who argues that health care came to play an increasingly central role in monastic life and praxis.
9. McGowan's work on *Ascetic Eucharists* raises fascinating questions about the valence of food content identified in these, and subsequent strata of early rules.
10. Rubenson, *Letters of Antony*, 145–152; Cf. Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*.
11. Per Athanasius' *Vit. Ant.* (1–49), Antony was the son of a prosperous Egyptian family. Left in charge of his parents' household at a young age, he sold his belongings and gave this money to the poor. After consigning his sister to "respected and trusted virgins," he retired from village life. A period of peregrination brought him to a place called Pispir. Here he lived in an abandoned fort, located on a ridge overlooking the eastern bank of the Nile River for some 20 years. Over time, he came to direct a community that followed him to this "outer mountain." If authentic, one can surmise that the rule would have been addressed to this group, informally comprised individuals who had taken up residence in the region of Antony's retreat.
12. Thomas and Hero, *Monastic Foundation Documents*, 22.
13. The introduction to Anna Silvas' recently published *Asketikon of St Basil the Great* offers the most detailed overview of the various layers that comprise the Rules attributed to Basil. Her analysis underscores the progressive character of the material included in extant compilations (1–18).
14. In her volume, *Virgins of God*, Susanna Elm likewise explores the evolution of Basil's Rule in conversation with the various communal configurations that may have progressively shaped its content (60–77).
15. Cf. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 47–65.
16. Read in conversation with the meal practice reflected in the Rules attributed to Antony and Basil, these more stringent directives may well reflect the challenge of enforcing ascetic discipline in contexts increasingly characterized by greater economic and social diversity.
17. It is not unlikely that only a small subset of this material registers normative practice within the earliest strata of the Pachomian communal constituencies.
18. Cf. Thomas and Hero, *Monastic Foundation Documents*, 1–18.
19. Thanks to Sabine Jäger-Wersonig, director of the Austrian Archeological Excavation, for responding to my query about a ceiling transept above the presiding table in the *triclinium* of a reconstructed Ephesian Terrace House. Here an example of the dining room/refectory arrangement depicted in the *Regula Magistri* remains *in situ*.
20. Cf. Larsen, "Early Christian Meals and Slavery," chapter 12 in this volume, for further discussion of the intersecting roles assigned slaves and monks.
21. *Reg. Mag.* 24.18–19. Further instruction addresses the question of noncommunity members at the meal: "If non-monks (*laici*) happen to come to the monastic meal, to avoid defamation afterwards in the world should a worldling

learn the secrets of God (*cum secreta Dei saecularis agnouerit*), let the reading be taken from some other book, if the abbot so please, so that the secret of the monastery and the established norms for leading a life of sanctity many not be learned by scoffers. In this case let him read another text, first making a mark in the Rule. If the nonmonk admitted to the monastic meal is such that the abbot is certain he not only is capable of appreciating the divine ordinances but is even so religious that he could follow this manner of life and could be drawn to godly ways, when such a one comes to the table the reader will continue the Rule. For those who are capable of observing it as it should be [observed] should hear the Rule of the monastery" (*Reg. Mag.* 24.20–25).

22. Cf. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 47–65; Taussig, *In the Beginning was the Meal*.
23. Thanks to Hal Taussig for initial conversation about the shape of such generative discourse.
24. In the *Dialogues*, Gregory the Great recounts the *Life of Benedict*. Within this frame, he also tells the story of "how Benedict wrote a rule for his monks" (2.36).
25. In introducing Colm Luibhead's English translation of John Cassian's *Conferences*, Owen Chadwick suggests that over the course of five centuries, Cassian's "ideas could hardly be escaped by the monks of the Western world," 29.
26. Taussig, *In the Beginning was the Meal*, 67–68.
27. Here intersections with Matthias Klinghardt's work on the utopian aspects of meal practice invite further analysis.

CHAPTER 18

Inclined to Decline Reclining? Women, Corporeality, and Dining Posture in Early Rabbinic Literature

Jordan D. Rosenblum

Imagine it is the year 209 CE. You are a disciple in a rabbinic circle located in a city in Palestine. Your rabbinic mentor invites you to a banquet that he is hosting in celebration of his son's wedding. Do you bring your wife?

In essence, this is the question that I seek to answer in this essay.* Were women present at such commensal encounters? And, if so, were they reclining? In the process of asking this question, we learn about early rabbinic (or tannaitic)¹ concepts of corporality because, as is also the case in ancient discussions of dining posture in the larger Greek and Roman milieu, to talk about women at the table is to talk about the issues associated with female bodies: sex, power, procreation, etc. Throughout, I continually ask the question: with regard to women at the table, were the Tannaim inclined to decline reclining?

In order to answer this question, I turn to linguistic evidence: namely, when the Hebrew verb "to recline (on a dining couch)" (*sbb*) appears, do women appear? And, if so, are they reclining? This approach provides a clear litmus test. As we shall see, the evidence is meager. The very paucity of evidence, in fact, is suggestive. For these reasons, I am inclined to argue that the early rabbis were, indeed, inclined to decline reclining.

The Verb “To Recline” in the Tannaitic Corpus

The Hebrew verb *sbb* can mean “to recline (on a dining couch)” in both *piel* and *hifil* conjugations.² This verb is used to describe the act of reclining while eating several times in the tannaitic corpus. For example, rabbis are often depicted as reclining at a meal (usually on festivals), discussing various facets of *halakhah* (rabbinic law).³ Perhaps unsurprisingly, several of these reclining scenes feature food blessings as the topic of conversation.⁴ However, while the verb *sbb* refers to the commensal practice of reclining in a variety of contexts—from the *halakhah* of purity⁵ to funeral banquets⁶—only once is a woman present.⁷ This text deserves our attention.

According to *t. Yevamot* 13:1:⁸

At first, they would write writs of protest:⁹ “she is not suitable for him; she does not desire him; and she does not want to be married to him.”¹⁰ The House of Hillel says: “In a court or not in a court⁷—but on the condition that there should be three [witnesses].”¹¹ R. Yose b. R. Yehudah and R. Lazar¹² b. R. Shimon say: “Even before two [witnesses].” How is the duty of protest [effected]:¹³ She testified: “I do not want So-and-So, my husband. I do not want the betrothal that my mother or brothers made on my behalf.” Even if she is sitting in a litter¹⁴ and went to the one who betrothed her to him, and she said to him: “I do not want So-and-So, my husband, this [man]”—there is no protest greater than this. R. Yehudah says: “Even if she went to buy something from a storekeeper,¹⁵ and she said to him [i.e., the storekeeper]: “I do not want So-and-So, my husband, this [man]”—there is no protest greater than this. [Even] more than this, R. Yehudah said: “*Even if there are guests reclining [in her husband’s house, and she is standing and giving drink to them]*,¹⁶ and she said to them: “I do not want So-and-So, my husband”—there is no protest greater than this.

In the midst of a *halakhic* discussion about a woman protesting a betrothal made on her behalf while she was a minor, the dining couch and the verb *sbb* make an appearance. However, is the woman reclining while protesting her marriage?

In *t. Yevamot* 13:1, the woman talks to reclining guests. Yet, she is not explicitly depicted as reclining. The contrast of postures is even starker in the parallel *baraita* on *b. Yevamot* 108a, which unambiguously describes the woman as *standing* (*omedet*) and serving the guests. She is not reclining and eating; she is standing and serving. Therefore, the one instance in which a woman appears in a tannaitic text in which the verb *sbb* means “to recline (on a dining couch)” does not depict the woman as participating in the commensal practice of reclining.

Of course, our examination of the verb *sbb* in the tannaitic corpus does not definitively prove that women did not recline at tannaitic meals. All it does show is that women are not *explicitly* described as doing so in extant literary contexts.¹⁷ Is this an absence of evidence or an evidence of absence? To answer this question, perhaps it would help to expand our data set. Therefore, as a means of comparison, let us now turn to the significantly larger amoraic corpus.

The Verb “To Recline” in the Amoraic Corpus

While I had initially intended to confine my analysis to the tannaitic corpus, I have decided to survey the occurrences of *sbb* in amoraic texts for two reasons.¹⁸ In addition to expanding our data set, this also offers us the opportunity to explore the possibility of change over time: namely do women appear in a reclining posture in later rabbinic texts?¹⁹ For the most part, the amoraic data accord with the tannaitic data.²⁰ However, there are three texts in which women recline. These texts deserve our attention, as neither case provides unambiguous evidence for the presence of respectable women (or women in general) on the dining couch.

In the midst of a (most likely) scholastic²¹ discussion about the status of wine on a table shared between Jews and idolaters, *b. Avodah Zarah* 69b-70a states:

Raba said: “[If] an idolatrous whore [*zonah* ‘*ovedet kokhavim*] and a Jewish man [*yisra’el*] were reclining beside each other,²² the wine is permitted because, [while] the desire for transgression²³ would be strong in them, the desire for libated wine [*yayn nesekeh*] would not be strong in them. [If] a Jewish whore [*zonah yisra’elit*] and an idolater were reclining, the wine [belonging to her] is prohibited. Why? Because she would be held in contempt by them and [be influenced] to follow after them.”

Several assumptions pervade this text: men have one thing on their mind when sharing a table with women (and it most certainly is not pouring wine as a libation!);²⁴ women are more influenced by men than men are by women;²⁵ and the desire to libate wine is so strong that one can never trust a non-Jew around wine unless the non-Jew is heavily supervised.

What, if anything, do we learn about women and men reclining together from this text? Unfortunately, the answer is not very much. In each scenario, the woman involved is quite explicitly a whore (*zonah*). This is not a coincidence; it is clearly meant to convey the association with idolatry and a violation of the covenant with *Yhwh* that exists already in biblical texts.

Thus, women function as literary foils here. Further, even if real women are the subject at hand, these are by no means “respectable” women.²⁶ For these reasons, the extent to which these reclining scenes can be utilized to make larger comments about women, corporality, and dining posture is limited.

The second and third appearances of women reclining on the dining couch occur in the midst of discussions concerning the proper observance of commensal practices relating to Passover.

y. Pesahim 10:1 (37b):

R. Simon [said] in the name of R. Yehoshua b. Levi: “That [i.e., Matzah] olive-sized portion²⁷ with which a man²⁸ fulfills his obligation on Passover must be eaten while reclining.” R. Yose came before R. Simon [and asked]: “Even a slave before his master? Even a wife before her husband?” He [= R. Simon] said to him: “Great man, until here I have heard.”²⁹

b. Pesahim 108a:

A woman in her husband’s house need not [*lo’ be’a*] recline; but if she is an important woman she must [*tzrikha*] recline.

The question being answered (or, possibly, avoided) in these texts is whether women are obligated to recline on the Passover.³⁰ In both texts, it seems that women (and slaves) are a curious case because, while the head of the household—the husband—must recline, there is an ambiguity vis-à-vis women (and slaves, both of which must tend to the needs of the head of the household): Must they also recline or do they stand and serve him?³¹

While women are included in amoraic literature in other Passover practices that involve preparation and consumption of food, they are not required to perform these acts in public while reclining.³² This is not the case for men—whether free or slave.³³ Marjorie Lehman has offered a compelling argument for why women are not obligated to recline on Passover. In sum, dining posture is used to maintain a desired social hierarchy. Since I could not state it any better, I quote Lehman at length:

This exemption attests to the fact that legal decisions can concretize sociocultural anxieties. In other words, by exempting wives and daughters from the ritual of reclining, the rabbis may be exhibiting their discomfort with wives who perform the same rituals as they do. Reclining symbolizes the freedom of the Israelites from slavery; to abstain from reclining signifies that “freedom” does not mean the same thing for everyone. Wives who do not recline willfully acknowledge their secondary status in relation to those who are required to participate fully in Passover rites

(i.e. men). Indeed, it seems that the Amoraim are encouraging wives to adhere to a particular familial-social pecking order rather than choose to embrace rituals designed to commemorate biblical events that also have meaning for them. Hence, the active participation of wives in Passover ritual can be tempered by their refusal to recline at the table of their husbands. Indeed, this legal position maintains the male-topped familial hierarchy and highlights the fact that husband/wife and father/daughter relationships are central to sustaining this social structure.³⁴

Lehman admits that there are two potential complicating factors for her argument. First, an “important woman” is required to recline. However, an “important woman” is clearly a different case from an average woman. The precise meaning of this phrase is unclear. Many scholars understand the issue to be that an “important woman” is able to afford slaves who can serve her, thus freeing her from that duty and allowing her to recline.³⁵ In addition, an “important woman” could be an independently wealthy woman who is single, divorced, or widowed. Outside of the patrilineal family structure, this woman would represent a different case and, in Lehman’s opinion, would “pose far less of a threat” to the (desired) status quo.³⁶ In either case, an “important woman” is not the average woman and, as such, should not be used to extrapolate about women, dining posture, and corporality at the Passover table.

Second, Lehman reminds us that women are exempt—*not prohibited*—from reclining.³⁷ The differences between exemption and prohibition have been hotly debated, especially given their ramifications for the place of women in modern Jewish law (*halakhah*).³⁸ However, I believe that Lehman is correct to point out that the rabbinic language of exemption is one of tentativeness. The early rabbis are attempting to configure the world as they wish it to be, and women’s place in that world is still being negotiated. What roles should women play? Where in the hierarchy should they be placed? These issues sometimes result in tentative language in much the same way that inchoate ideas in this essay are bracketed with semantic strategies (e.g., passive voice, modifiers). Nevertheless, while these texts do not explicitly prohibit women from reclining, they neither obligate women (*writ large*) to do so, nor do they seem to assume that the average woman appears reclining on the dining couch.

Once again, when talking about the act of reclining on a dining couch, women are noticeably absent. None of the three exceptions to this broad statement provide much information in support of woman’s ability to function as active subjects of the verb *sbb*. In *b. Avodah Zarah* 69b-70a, if the women present were not literary foils, then they certainly were not “good

Jewish girls.” And in *y. Pesahim* 10:1 (37b) and *b. Pesahim* 108a, the presence of reclining women on the Passover dining couch is, at best, ambiguous.

It would seem that the dining couch in classic rabbinic literature is gendered as male. Lehman’s contention that the Passover dining couch becomes a locus of power and that the commensal practice of reclining is used to maintain a desired social (and gender) hierarchy therefore accords with the evidence of the rabbinic dining couch in general.³⁹ It would seem that the Amoraim, like their tannaitic predecessors, were indeed inclined to decline reclining.

Conclusions

Return again to that imagined scenario in the year 209 CE. You are a disciple in a rabbinic circle located in a city in Palestine. Your rabbinic mentor invites you to a banquet that he is hosting in celebration of his son’s wedding. Do you bring your wife? The evidence encountered in this essay would suggest that, most likely, your wife would not be on the guest list.⁴⁰ Further, our survey of *sbb* in the amoraic corpus suggests that your wife would not be on the guest list in 409 CE either, whether in Palestine or Babylonia.

When the Tannaim and the Amoraim discuss reclining, they almost never depict women on the dining couch; and when they do, as we have seen, these appearances are, at the very least, problematic. Although a variety of factors may make us want to find women at the table—from the pious (theological convictions) to the academic (Greek, Roman, and Christian evidence certainly provide ample possible analogues)⁴¹—the tannaitic (and amoraic) table seems to resist these modern desires. The early rabbis were imagining an ideal world, one in which women shared an uncertain place.⁴² While the real might not have matched the ideal, the extant textual evidence provides no reason for arguing that, at least at the ideal early rabbinic table, women were present and reclining.⁴³

So then, what do we learn about women, corporeality, and dining posture from our survey of *sbb* in tannaitic and amoraic literature? Very little and a lot. We learn very little since, as has already been discussed in detail, there is very little evidence in general and, in particular, the evidence that does exist is ambiguous at best. We learn a lot because sometimes an absence of evidence can serve as an evidence of absence. Perhaps women are almost never described as reclining because the Tannaim (and, it would seem, the Amoraim as well) preferred to reserve that dining posture exclusively for men, most likely for reasons of maintaining a gendered hierarchy. And perhaps women are often absent from the tannaitic table because these are texts written by men, for men, and about men. While we might be reading these

texts to uncover data about women, the original producers and consumers of these texts did not share our modern concerns. For them, so it would seem, meals were about men. Women might have produced them, consumed them, and (most likely?) partaken of them with men, but this is not the point. For the early rabbis, meals were about men.

The early rabbinic table served as a locus of identity negotiation. Who was and was not able to engage in commensality therein defined who was and was not a rabbinic Jew. The borders of the Tannaim and Amoraim, like so many groups, began at the borders of the table. The presence of women in the rabbinic world was inchoate, as these early rabbis debated the role that women would play in the nascent rabbinic movement. Reclining is but one way that the early rabbis used a practice (commensal or otherwise) to establish hierarchy. In this way, the early rabbis were like so many of their Mediterranean contemporaries: more than simply a commensal practice, reclining was an action with enormous social, cultural, and political repercussions.⁴⁴

Notes

*I thank Chris Jones for fastidiously fact-checking this essay and Israel Haas for proofreading it. Any omissions or misrepresentations that remain should be credited to the author.

1. The Tannaim (singular: Tanna) lived from 70 CE to roughly 250 CE in Roman Palestine. Following the Tannaim are a group of rabbis known as the Amoraim (singular: Amora), who lived from roughly 250 CE to 500 CE in both Palestine and Babylonia.
2. See Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 948–949. The usual meaning of verbs derived from the root *sbb* is “to go around,” “surround,” or “turn.” The semantic range of *sbb* in Jewish Palestinian Aramaic (which probably borrowed this verb from Hebrew) is more limited, only meaning “to recline.” See Sokoloff, *Dictionary*, 365. This root provides the modern Hebrew word for “party” (*mesibbah*; present in classical rabbinic Hebrew, as well).
3. For example, *t. Berakhot* 4:15 (= *b. Berakhot* 37a), 16; 5:2 (= *y. Pesahim* 10:1 [37b]; *b. Pesahim* 100a); *t. Pisha* 10:12; *t. Yom Tov* 2:12, 16; *t. Sukkah* 1:9; *Mekilta d'Rabbi Ishmael Amalek* 3 (= *Mekilta d'Rabbi Shimon b. Yohai* at Exodus 18:12; *Sifre Deuteronomy* 38, 41 (= *Midrash Tannaim* 11:13; *b. Qiddushin* 40b); *b. Qiddushin* 32b); *Midrash Tannaim* 11:10; *baraitot* on *b. Sanhedrin* 11a (= *b. Sotah* 48b). A *baraita* (plural: *baraitot*) is a reputed tannaitic statement that appears in a later rabbinic document. It may, or may not, appear in the tannaitic corpus and it may, or may not, be tannaitic in origin.
4. For example, *m. Berakhot* 6:6 (= *y. Berakhot* 6:6 [9d]; *t. Berakhot* 4:8, 15 (= *b. Berakhot* 37a), 16, 20 (= *y. Berakhot* 7:2 [11b]; *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 7:1);

- 5:3, 5 (= *y. Ta'anit* 4:2 [68a]; *b. Berakhot* 46b); *baraitot* on *b. Berakhot* 51b; *b. Pesahim* 102a-b.
5. For example, *m. Nega'im* 13:9 (= *t. Nega'im* 7:10; *t. Terumot* 10:9; *Sifra Mesora' pereq* 7:5; *b. Berakhot* 41a; *b. Erubin* 4a; *b. Sukkah* 6a; *b. Hullin* 71b).
 6. For example, *m. Sanhedrin* 2:1 (= *y. Mo'ed Qatan* 3:5 [83a]; *y. Sanhedrin* 2:2 [19d]; *b. Sanhedrin* 18a), 3 (= *b. Mo'ed Qatan* 27a; *b. Nedarim* 56a; *b. Sanhedrin* 20a).
 7. Rather than bog down the text in details, I will simply note here the other instances in which the verb *sbb*, meaning "to recline (on a dining couch)" appears and women, at least explicitly, do not: *m. Pesahim* 10:1 (= *t. Pisha* 10:1; *Exodus Rabbah* 20:18; even the poor recline on Passover); *m. Nedarim* 4:4 (vows and sharing a dining couch); *m. Sanhedrin* 2:4 (= *Sifre Deuteronomy* 161; king reads Torah scroll while reclining); *t. Berakhot* 5:20 (= *Genesis Rabbah* 91:3; the possible effects of changing dining posture from sitting to reclining on the recitation of grace after meals); *t. Demai* 3:7–8 (cf. *y. Demai* 2:2 [22d]; tithing issues with regard to fellows and associates eating together which, at one point, explicitly mentions a *son*); 5:7 (tithes and left-over food); *Mekilta d'Rabbi Ishmael Nezikin* 2 (a master should give his slave the same food, drink, and *hesebo*, which here probably means bed; however, it could refer to reclining, so I include it in this list); *Sifre Deuteronomy* 53 (= *Midrash Tannaim* 11:17; a banquet parable about Israel being happy with its divinely ordained inheritance, where the recliners are called *bene mesiba*, literally "sons of reclining"); a *baraita* on *b. Berakhot* 11a (= *Midrash Tannaim* 6:7; rules for reciting the *shema*); a *baraita* on *b. Sanhedrin* 23a (some cautious(?) Jerusalemites would not engage in commensality unless they knew their fellow recliners). A reputed *baraita* on *b. Berakhot* 43b states that it is unbecoming of a scholar to recline with "peoples of the land." However, as Shaye Cohen has argued, this reflects a later development in rabbinic literature; as such, it is most likely amoraic—and not tannaitic—in origin. See Cohen, *Place of the Rabbi*, 165–168, especially pp. 166–167.
 8. Ed. Lieberman 3:45–46.
 9. A writ of protest is written when a woman wishes to protest a marriage contracted while she is still a minor.
 10. The wording of this writ of protest is written in Aramaic.
 11. The first part of this quote (in quotation marks) appears in *m. Yevamot* 13:1.
 12. Some manuscripts read: "Elazar."
 13. The rest of this text appears, albeit in a slightly different order and with some slight variations, in a *baraita* on *b. Yevamot* 108a. For a technical discussion of the differences between these two sources, see Lieberman, *Tosefta Ki-fshutah*, 6:151–153.
 14. Frequently, the term for litter (*'appiryon*) signifies the litter that carries a bride in a wedding procession. For example, see *t. Sotah* 15:9. On the wedding procession in rabbinic literature, see Satlow, *Jewish Marriage*, 170–173 (the *'appiryon* is discussed on p. 172).

15. In the *baraita* on *b. Yevamot* 108a, the woman's husband explicitly sends her to the store to buy something for him. Perhaps this better explains why the person to whom the woman disavows her marriage is a storekeeper?
16. Emphasis added. The words in square brackets appear only in the *baraita* on *b. Yevamot* 108a. I discuss the differences between these two versions, below. In both versions, however, the commensal setting is most likely a wedding banquet. There are two types of wedding-related meals mentioned in tannaitic literature: betrothal meals and wedding banquets. On betrothal meals, see *m. Pesahim* 3:7 (= *t. Pisha* 3:12); *m. Ketubbot* 1:5; *m. Bava Batra* 9:5; *t. Megillah* 3:14–15. The betrothal meal apparently involved the recitation of a “groom's blessing.” On this blessing (the text of which actually appears for the first time on *b. Ketubbot* 7b–8a), see Satlow, *Jewish Marriage*, 63–65, 164. On the wedding banquet (often called a *mishteh*), see *m. Hallah* 2:7 (= *Sifre Numbers* 110); *m. Nega'im* 3:2 (= *Sifra Tazria pereg* 5; *Mesora parasha* 5); *Sifra Behuqotai pereg* 5; *t. Shabbat* 7:9; *t. Bava Metzi'a* 8:28. For additional references, see Satlow, *Jewish Marriage*, 339–340 n. 107. An inscription from the Horbat Susiya synagogue mentions a rabbi making a donation vow at the wedding feast (*mishteh*) of his son. This mosaic inscription, which is roughly contemporary to the tannaitic period, provides extra-rabbinic evidence for both this event and this terminology. On this inscription, see Naveh, *On Stone*, no. 75 (pp. 115–116); Satlow, *Jewish Marriage*, 179–180. For nonrabbinic evidence for the wedding banquet, see John 2:1–5; Tobit 7–10; *Joseph and Aseneth*, 21:6; Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, 5:289.
17. However, other evidence does call women's participation in tannaitic commensal activities into question. See Rosenblum, *Food and Identity*, 103–137.
18. On rare occasions, the verb *rba'* can also mean “to recline (on a dining couch).” For example, see *y. Berakhot* 8:5 (12b), which discusses the rules of blessings and dining etiquette by recounting an interaction between three reclining rabbis (compare the somewhat similar etiquette snafu that occurs, with different rabbis and with the verb *sbb*, in *Midrash Mishlei* 9:5). In this essay, I have decided to focus on the verb *sbb* because it is by far the most common technical term for rabbinic dining posture. Perhaps a future, more expanded, version of this essay would (should?) include a fuller treatment of the term *rba'*. In the meantime, it should be noted that, in the one instance in which I have encountered *rba'* as having this meaning, the dining experience depicted therein simply buttresses my argument vis-à-vis *sbb*, in that we once again observe a commensal interaction between reclining, male rabbis.
19. Since the amoraic corpus includes both Palestinian and Babylonian texts, one should always look for variations due to different cultural and physical environments. However, I did not find any such relevant difference in regard to women, dining posture, and the verb *sbb*.
20. While I will not discuss these texts in detail, I provide here the amoraic references to *sbb* (meaning “to recline [on a dining couch]”; when the subject is simply guests [*mesubbin* = “recliners”] or a dining party [= *mesibbah*]), I only cite

it when it seems germane) that I do not examine in this paper, commenting on anything of relevant interest: *y. Berakhot* 2:8 (5c); 6:1 (10a); 7:5 (11d); *y. 'Erubin* 6:8 (24a); *y. Pesahim* 10:1 (37b), 3 (37d); *y. Bava Batra* 9:3 (16d); *b. Berakhot* 16a, 17b-18a (= *b. Mo'ed Qatan* 23b; cf. *y. Berakhot* 3:1 [6a]; *y. Mo'ed Qatan* 3:5 [82b]), 42b-43a (discussed in Marks, "Present and Absent," chapter 8 in this volume), 46b; *b. Berakhot* 2b; *b. 'Erubin* 73b (= *b. 'Erubin* 85b); *b. Pesahim* 101b, 108a (cf. *Kallah Rabbati* 2:16), 113b; *b. Moed Qatan* 28b (cf. *b. Ketubbot* 69b; among a list of people who recline at the head of the table, the bridegroom is mentioned, but *not* the bride); *b. Hagigah* 14b; *b. Nedarim* 41b; *b. Bava Batra* 98b; *b. Sanhedrin* 59b (= *Avot d'Rabbi Natan* A1:62; wherein Adam is depicted reclining—served by ministering angels and observed by the serpent—but Eve is noticeably absent); *Avot d'Rabbi Natan* A6:55 (in which a male's name is said to derive from his ostentation, as evidenced by his reclining on a silver couch); B13:16 (in which the recliners are specified as Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai and the great men of the city [of Jerusalem]); *Genesis Rabbah* 25:7 (God made the Israelites recline in the desert and eat manna); 71:2 (= *Ruth Rabbah* 7:13; *Pesiqa de Rab Kahana* 20:2; which utilizes a word play on the root 'qr [= barren, root, and chief, depending on its vocalization] to say that, since the majority of the recliners at [Leah's? Jacob's?] table were from Leah's root, then she was the chief; however, Leah is never explicitly described as reclining in this passage); 93:7 (cf. *Tanhuma Vayigash* 4; a meal between Joseph and his brothers); *Exodus Rabbah* 25:8 (God reclines above the patriarchs); *Leviticus Rabbah* 7:4; *Lamentations Rabbah* 4:1, 3 (the famous passage where, as a result of a mistaken dinner invitation, a spurned [male] dinner guest exacts revenge that results in the destruction of the Temple); *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 9:8.1 (= *Ecclesiastes Zutta* 9); *Song of Songs Rabbah* 1:12; *Lamentations Zuta* 1 (while Rabban's mother prepares an elaborate feast in this text—even slaughtering a lamb herself[!]²¹—the verb for reclining is in the masculine singular and the text clearly supplies the subject of the verb: Rabban); *Midrash Mishlei* 9:5; *Tanhuma Vayera* 18 (kings reclining beside Ezekiel); *Shemini* 3; *Korah* 8 (= *Midrash Yelammedenu Korah* 8; which discusses testimonial concerning a king's daughter's virginity during a wedding feast; however, the bride—or any other woman for that matter—is not explicitly included among the recliners); *Derekh Eretz* 4:2; 5:3; 6:3 (which all use the term "man" [*adam*]); 7:22; *Pesiqa de Rab Kahana* 3; 6:3 (= *Pesiqa Rabbati* 16); 20:2 (= *Ruth Rabbah* 7); *Pesiqa Rabbati* 10, 30. While I include texts here that most scholars consider to be amoraic, the dating of many of these documents is debated. Thus, I have included some texts that might be later and excluded other texts that might be earlier. When in doubt, I have generally cited texts that, although they might be later, seemed relevant to the subject at hand.

21. On the term "scholastic," see Cohen, *Judean Legal Tradition*, 134–135. While Cohen comments on the beginning of this trend in the Mishnah, the scholastic approach permeates the subsequent rabbinic corpus.
22. The translation of this line is actually a bit tricky. The verb for "reclining" (*mesubbin*) is in the plural, but the preposition for "beside" (*'etzlah*) is singular

with a feminine pronominal suffix (literally: “beside her”). As such, one could render this line in a variety of ways, including some combination of the following: “If idolatrous whores and Jewish men were reclining besides one another”; “If an idolatrous whore was reclining beside a Jewish man”; etc.

23. Obviously, the “transgression” of which they speak is sexual in nature. On the connection between commensality and sexual relations with non-Jewish women, see Rosenblum, “From Their Bread.” For another example of reclining as a metaphor for sex, see *b. Shabbat* 62b-63a, in which the “vulgar” (*shabatze*) men of Jerusalem talk about enjoying their “meal” (= sex) on either a “wide couch [*meseb*] or a narrow couch.” Included within a series of food and consumption metaphors, this list ends with the proclamation: “Rav Hisda said: It was all for prostitution [*zenut*].” Obviously, women would be present here, “reclining” alongside men on these couches. However, the heavy metaphorical language implies that the context here is not the kitchen but the bedroom, an observation that does not escape the notice of Rashi (as the verb *meseb* can also mean “to lie [on a bed],” e.g., *b. Bava Qamma* 113a). On women as food metaphors in rabbinic literature (including a brief discussion of this text), see Weingarten, *Gynaecophagia*.
24. The fact that men have only one thing on their mind when dining with women is reinforced by another text, in which the innuendo of sex appears in the midst of a potential reclining scene. *Maasekhet Kallah* 1:3 (cf. *Kallah Rabbati* 1:5) discusses interactions with the bride of another Jewish man. In this text, Rabbi Eliezer is asked about “drinking from the hand of the bride”—a phrase that clearly has a sexual valence. In this case, the husband is described as both present and reclining; however, the bride’s posture is in question: namely does “the husband recline with her” mean that she is reclining? The verb (*meseb*) is singular and masculine and refers to the husband, but it could also be read to include the woman’s dining posture. In either case, the actions are not to be seen as positive, since Rabbi Eliezer concludes that, “whoever drinks from the hand of a bride, it is as if he drinks with a whore [*zonah*].” Whether the husband and wife are actually reclining together, the focus is on the inappropriate actions of the other men. (Contrast *b. Shabbat* 88b [= *b. Gittin* 36b], where the focus is on the inappropriate actions of the bride who plays the harlot beneath her wedding canopy; the condemnation of her actions is derived from Song of Songs 1:12, in which a king reclines [*mesibbo*] at his table, though the gender [and number] of his guests is unspecified therein.) Thus, it is difficult to reach a firm conclusion for our purposes based on this text. Further, this text presents at least two other difficulties. First, the commensal scene in question seems to be a wedding banquet, at which women’s presence is (it would seem) expected. Yet, finding explicit evidence for women’s presence at wedding banquets is quite difficult (see Rosenblum, *Food and Identity*, 126–128; and Susan Marks’ excellent essay in this volume). Second, the date of *Maasekhet Kallah* might be too late for our considerations. While many date the text to Geonic times (e.g., Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction*, 229), some date it earlier (e.g., Brodsky, *Bride*,

- 34–86). Since this text does not alter my argument, I have decided to “pass the buck”—i.e., to note it, discuss it, but not to take a direct (or indirect) stance on this issue. I thank David Brodsky for discussing this text with me (he also briefly treats this text in *Bride*, 120).
25. On the notion of self-restraint as a masculine attribute in rabbinic literature in general, see Satlow, *Try to be a Man*.
 26. Women of ill-repute often make appearances in Greek and Roman banquet scenes (although this subject has been much discussed and nuanced, especially to allow for change over time with regard to the presence of respectable women in later Roman texts). For a discussion, see, for example, Corley, *Private Women*, 24–66; Roller, *Dining Posture*, 96–156; Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 42–44.
 27. This phrase is difficult to render. In this translation, I have done my best to be faithful to the original Hebrew. A looser translation, but which better conveys the meaning of the words, would be: “Matzah [unleavened bread] that is equivalent to an olive’s amount of food . . .” or “An olive-sized portion of matzah . . .” An olive is a standard measure for the minimum amount of food needed to be consumed/prepared for certain things to take effect/be fulfilled in rabbinic literature.
 28. I render ‘*adam*’ here as “man” because, as we shall see, the assumption in this text is that free men are being referred to, and that slaves and women are deviations from the norm that must be explained on a case-by-case basis.
 29. The meaning of this final phrase in Hebrew (*‘ad ka’an shama’ti*) is ambiguous, in that it can be understood to either acknowledge or dismiss the problem detected by R. Yose. See Lehman, “Women and Passover Observance,” 65 n. 54.
 30. However, it must be stated that both texts speak only about *wives*. The extent to which women who are single, divorced, or widowed could recline at Passover is not discussed. One could assume that these women are allowed to recline (e.g., Lehman, *Women and Passover Observance*, 54) or that these women are somehow included in the discussion at hand. Either way, this is unclear in these texts and, for this reason; I do not believe that one can extrapolate much information about women and reclining from them.
 31. Similarly, see Hauptman, “From the Kitchen,” 111–112; Hezser, “Passover and Social Equality,” 103–104.
 32. For references and discussion, see Lehman, “Women and Passover Observance,” 53–55. On women in tractate *Pesahim* in general (although not with regard to reclining), see Hauptman, “Women in Tractate *Pesahim*.”
 33. The obligation of a male slave to recline is discussed later on *b. Pesahim* 108a. For a discussion, see Hauptman, “From the Kitchen,” 111–112; Hezser, “Passover and Social Equality,” 103–104.
 34. Lehman, “Women and Passover Observance,” 54.
 35. For example, see Hauptman, “From the Kitchen,” 111–112; Hezser, “Passover and Social Equality,” 103–104. However, Hauptman and Hezser appear to

- differ on whether this indicates that an average woman could (Hauptman) or could not (Hezser) recline. As I will discuss further below, I am in agreement with Hezser on this matter. The difference between women of means and average women is not a concern in *y. Pesahim* 10:1 (37b). There is precedent elsewhere in rabbinic literature for treating women of means differently than less wealthy women. For example, see *m. Ketubbot* 5:5, which discusses the effect of personal wealth on a wife's required duties. This text is often mentioned in discussions of gender in rabbinic literature (e.g., Peskowitz, *Spinning Fantasies*, 97–101; Wegner, *Chattel or Person?*, 76–77; Weingarten, “Magiros,” 291–292).
36. Lehman, “Women and Passover Observance,” 54. Here, I combine two of Lehman's points. She suggests that nonwives (single, divorced, or widowed women) are allowed to recline because they are less of a threat when discussing *b. Pesahim* 108a in general (and not in her discussion of the “important woman”). While this may be correct—since both texts only talk wives, as I discussed above—I believe that this observation can be further applied to the exceptional case of the “important woman.”
 37. Lehman, “Women and Passover Observance,” 54–55.
 38. For concise but informative discussions (with additional references), see Lehman, “Women and Passover Observance,” especially pp. 47–49, 54–55; Lehman, “The Gendered Rhetoric,” especially pp. 333–335. In the 1970s and 1980s, the Conservative movement in America justified counting women in prayer quorums and ordaining female rabbis based on this passage and others, which exempt—but do not prohibit—women from these obligations. For a brief discussion, see Satlow, *Creating Judaism*, 48–49.
 39. This observation also applies to the *Stammaim*, the “anonymous” group of rabbis who follow the *Amoraim* and redact (and provide anonymous comments on) the Talmud. See Lehman, *Women and Passover Observance*, 55–56.
 40. Similarly, see the brief (and minimally substantiated) remark by David Noy that, “[w]hen rabbis dined together, their wives were not expected to be present” (“Sixth Hour,” 138).
 41. On reclining in the ancient world, see the scholarly sources cited in n. 26 and the essays in Part IV of this volume. Other ancient Jewish evidence exists for women and dining posture, which I do not treat here. For example, while discussing a monastic community of male (*therapeutai*) and female (*therapeutrides*) philosophers, Philo notes the order of their reclining (*katakklisis*): men on the right and women on the left (*On the Contemplative Life*, 69). Of course, basing any argument on this evidence is always tricky, as Philo's description of the *Therapeutai/Therapeutrides* is a notorious crux: Are they a real community or a product of his fertile imagination? On this debate, see Taylor, *Jewish Women Philosophers*. However, since my concern here is to understand rabbinic attitudes toward women and dining posture, these data lay beyond the purview of this essay.
 42. In addition to Lehman's arguments cited above, one could cite a myriad of secondary sources that attest to this phenomenon in rabbinic literature

encountered in extra-commensal evidence. To cite but one of the many examples, see Eilberg-Schwartz, *Savage in Judaism*, 229–234, which argues that Torah study functions as a nonsexual form of procreation between male rabbi and male rabbinic disciple (cf. Jay, *Throughout Your Generations Forever*).

43. Of course, this is in contrast to another contemporary movement that was imagining an ideal world in which women shared an uncertain place: early Christianity, wherein women's presence at the table was "notable but not unique" in comparison to its milieu (Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 208). However, when women appear at banquets in Greek and Roman texts, they are sometimes depicted as sitting (as opposed to reclining, like the men) or characterized as prostitutes. For references and discussion, see Corley, *Private Women*, 26–34; Roller, *Dining Posture*, 96–156; Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 42–44, 208–209. Sexual innuendo perhaps underlies tannaitic texts regulating certain commensal interactions between men and women, as we have already seen (e.g., *m. Ketubbot* 5:9; *t. Shabbat* 1:14). Further, in the book of Judith, when Judith reclines in the presence of Holofernes, the scene is highly sexualized (12, especially 12:15–20).
44. On their Mediterranean contemporaries, see various other essays in this volume.

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